



Janet Reuter

May 2020

We are celebrating 125 years of the National Trust and Octavia Hill an amazing lady who founded the trust.

Although I have lived here in Germany for such a long time, I am often asked what do I miss most about Britain. This is a very easy question to answer. First, of course, I miss my family and the wonderful coastline of my homeland Wales. Next has to be the Victoria & Albert Museum and my visits there with my friend Liz in London. Then the **National Trust**. This organization is second to none in the whole world. It always amazes me to realise that this huge enterprise has existed for **125 years** and has depended all this time on donations, membership subscriptions and voluntary workers. I have already written in my weekly news about their gardens which are especially wonderful in the Spring time. However the National Trust is not only about houses and gardens it is about much more. It has a huge number of varying activities in many, many different areas of Britain. I had planned to visit Hever Castle and Sissinghurst which are both National Trust properties now in May as part of our England trip. I hope that we can go next year so it is a good idea to learn about the history of this wonderful organization.

The acorn leaf is the symbol of the National Trust.

This symbol represents perfectly what the Trust is all about. From small acorns, large oak trees grow. The oak tree was always very important in the history of Britain. The great oak forests provided houses especially in the Tudor period. Also the great ships of the Elizabethan period which established Britain as a world leader in trade and political power.



For the **National Trust**, the acorn stands for slow, dependable and strong growth.

It all started in **1895** in the **Victorian** times as very much a reaction to the growing strength of the **Industrial Revolution**. Although this time was so important in the development of new inventions, the use of these new technologies in an industrial context was responsible for many negative as well as positive situations. The loss of the countryside and the ruination of old and historic buildings and exploitation of the workers became big issues.

As a reaction to this the Trust was founded by three people who all shared an intense love of nature and a belief in social reform. These three founders were **Octavia Hill** a strong feminist and social housing reformer, **Sir Robert Hunter**, a solicitor in the Commons Preservation Society and **Canon Hardwick Rawnsley** a clergyman from the Lake District.

They founded a trust with “**the power to promote the permanent preservation for the benefit of the Nation of lands and buildings of beauty or historic interest**”.

This original pledge has not changed since the 19th century and is fiercely carried on today. Over the years some of its main sponsors have been **Beatrix Potter**, **Sir Winston Churchill**, **John Lennon** and **Paul McCartney**.

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Who was this remarkable lady who was a founder of the Trust.

Octavia Hill 1838-1912 was a pioneering thinker and social reformer. She worked tirelessly to improve urban housing and to protect green spaces and the impact of her life and work is still being felt. Her belief in the importance of access to nature for human wellbeing and the need to stop the destruction of the natural landscape are all the more relevant today. Octavia is a woman close to our hearts now in 2020!



She was born on 3 December 1838 at Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, the third daughter of a merchant James Hill and his third wife, Caroline Southwood Smith. Both of her parents were also keen social reformers and followers of socialism. They opened the **Wishbech Infant School** as 'a service to the wretched poor' and encouraged its use as a 'Hall for the People' in the evenings, with lectures, dances and meetings of the **Mental Improvement Society** being held there, to give education and enjoyment to the poor.

Octavia started her first job at the age of 14, taking charge of a workroom at the **Ladies Guild**, a Christian socialist co-operative in London managed by her mother, where the **Ragged School** girls made toys and dolls'-house furniture. Seeing the poverty of the girls at the school had a profound effect on the young Octavia.

Practical by nature, she organised midday meals for her workers, visited them when they were sick and also took them on nature-study walks around the London commons, which are green areas. It was the first of many initiatives that Octavia pioneered to improve the lives of those less fortunate than herself.

Through her mother's connections, Octavia came to know the pioneering **Christian Socialist** minister **Frederick Denison Maurice**, radical reformist thinker **John Ruskin** and the anti-capitalist critic and author **Charles Kingsley**. Inspired by their ideas, Octavia set out to improve working-class living conditions.

She began with a series of properties in **London's Paradise Place**, which John Ruskin purchased for her. Instead of the overcrowding and 12 per cent return on the investment that many landlords expected, Octavia settled for a more modest 5 per cent return, ensuring some of the money was used to keep the buildings in good repair and to improve the community.

She was firm in her style of management, insisting that all the tenants paid their rent on time, but she also took a personal interest in their lives. She became the friendly face of "landlordism". Her methods were firm but compassionate. She patiently fostered a reciprocal respect between landlord and tenant. This was entirely new at the time.

The scheme was a success and rapidly expanded with new investors. By 1874 Octavia had over 3,000 tenancies around London. During this time she met **Robert Hunter**, solicitor for the **Commons Preservation Society**. They shared the same ambitions. They successfully campaigned together, went on to found the **National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty in 1895** so that green spaces could 'be kept for the enjoyment, refreshment, and rest of those who have no country house'.

Until her death in 1912 Octavia continued to fight for the preservation of the countryside. She helped the National Trust to buy and protect its first land and houses and campaigned for the preservation of footpaths to ensure everyone had right of access to the land. Thank you so much Octavia, Britain without the National Trust is unthinkable! "**The need of quiet, the need of fresh air, the need of exercise...The sight of the sky and the things growing seem human needs common to all**". **Quote Octavia Hill.**

ENGLISCH ohne Stress NEWSLETTER

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The first purchase was **Alfriston Clergy House, Sussex** bought in **1896 for £10 !!!!** We visited this tiny house on our trip in 2011.



This is how the **Clergy House** looked in **1896**.
The photos on the right are how it now looks today!
Without the restoration there would be nothing left of this building which dates back to the **14th century**.
It was used to house the vicar of Alfriston and still belonged to the church until **1896**.



What is it all about today? It is unbelievable how it has grown and all thanks to **Octavia Hill** and her tireless campaign to establishment of this wonderful organization.

The **National Trust** has:

4 million members. 61.000 volunteers working behind the scenes for **3.1 million hours. 12.000 volunteer room stewards** to show people around the houses of whom over **100** have worked for over **50 years**.

120 fire fighters, 15 volunteer pilots, 2 beekeepers and 1 full time volunteer shepherd. 300 houses, 40 castles, 49 churches, 9 monasteries, 1 theatre, 61 pubs, 12 lighthouses, 385 holiday cottages.

200 gardens, 59 villages, 402 factories and mines.

6,310 prehistoric sites, 7 world heritage sites, 76 nature reserves.

605,000 acres of countryside and 709 miles of coastline.

43% of Britain's rain processed for drinking water runs through trust ground.

32 heritage plant collections. 3 film crews on a **National Trust** location every day.

5000 events are organized every year.

And most important of all, the **National Trust** ladies serve **3.5 million cups of tea a year !**

That's what we are going to drink together I hope with scones, strawberry jam and clotted cream in **May 2021!**

Birthdays in May

Annemarie Sacher

Hannelore Gal

Happy Birthday ladies!

