

THE LAGUERRE MURALS at FETCHAM PARK



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FETCHAM PARK

LOUIS LAGUERRE'S LIFE

Louis Laguerre (1663 – 1721) was born at the court of Louis XIV at Versailles in Paris, where his Catalan father worked as Master of the Menagerie. Educated by Jesuits, following the discovery of his talent for drawing, he studied under Charles Le Brun at the French Academy. In 1683 he came to England as an assistant to the painter Antonio Verrio (1639 – 1707) working on paintings for Windsor Castle, St Bartholomew's Hospital and Blenheim Palace. By 1687 he was working on his own commissions in the houses of the nobility, becoming their most popular decorative painter. He was employed by William III at Hampton Court (where he was given apartments), to repair Mantegna's cartoons and then to paint The Twelve Labours of Hercules, which unfortunately no longer exists.

He may have met the architect, William Talman, who designed Fetcham Park, when he worked at Windsor Castle, as he later worked with him on many of his projects, the most important being Chatsworth House between 1689 and 1694. Laguerre also worked at Sudbury Hall, Burleigh, Marlborough House, Petworth and Blenheim Palace. Some of his best regarded works at Buckingham House were destroyed when Buckingham Palace was built.

Having moved to England in 1683, he spent the rest of his life here, dying at Lincoln's Inn Theatre in 1721, whilst watching his son performing.

LAGUERRE'S WORKS AT FETCHAM PARK

There are five wall and ceiling murals painted in oil on plaster and six decorative panels painted in oil on wood by Louis Laguerre. They are painted in his typical baroque style, depicting mythological themes. Laguerre, like other artists of his time, often painted his own interpretation of a theme which had been painted by earlier artists.

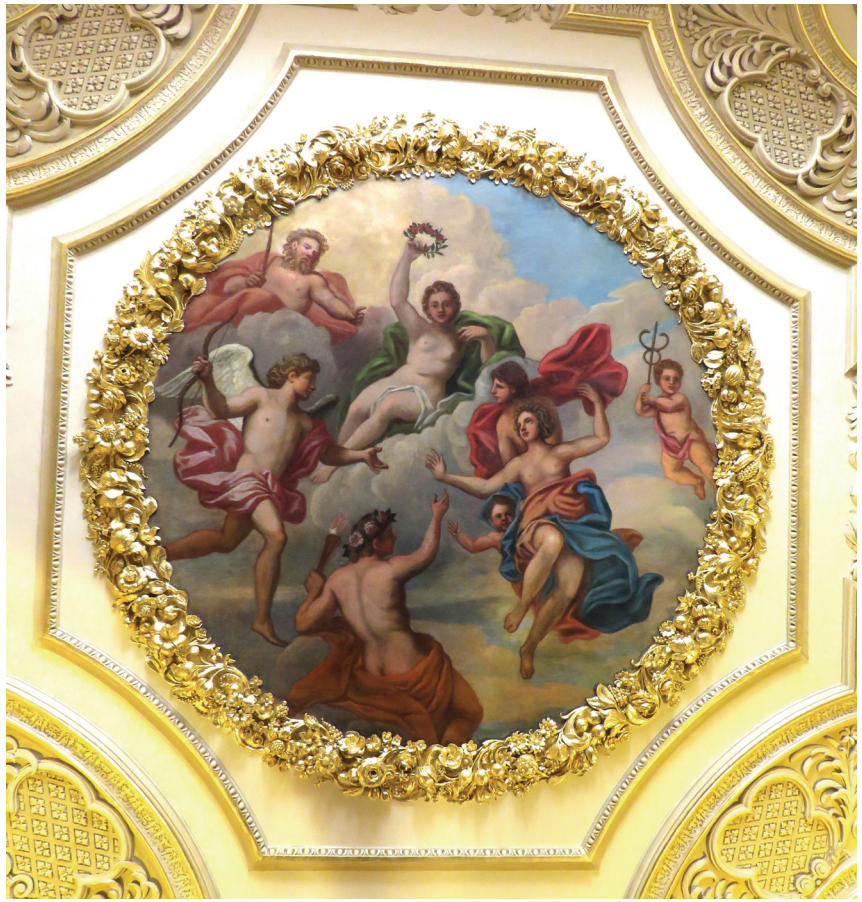
It is not known exactly when the murals were painted, but it is likely to have been around the time the house was built between 1700 and 1705.

THE MURALS

The murals suffered some damage over time, particularly in the late 1960s when the house was bought by the Ideal Development Company Ltd. when the house was left empty, unheated and not maintained and some vandalism also occurred. Overall, however, the murals are not considered to have suffered from over restoration. Paul Tsangari carried out conservation work on the murals in January 2019.

The Shell Room

The Shell Room opposite the main entrance has a ceiling mural which, together with the ceiling mural in the hall, is considered to be the best in the house. It depicts the *Marriage of Cupid and Psyche*, performed by Zeus, the father of the gods, after he had ordered Venus, Cupid's mother, to stop persecuting Psyche because of jealousy of her beauty. The elaborate plasterwork framing the mural, which includes shells giving the room its name is original and was hand-made, possibly by a Swiss or Italian craftsman. The plasterwork in the alcove to the door out to the garden is late 19th century.



Main Staircase

On the right hand wall of the main stairs is a mural depicting *Neptune and Amphitrite*. Neptune (or Poseidon in Greek) was god of the sea and earthquakes. In the myths he married Amphitrite, a sea-nymph, who he won by using a dolphin to court her on his behalf. Two earlier works of the same subject may have been seen by Laguerre. “The Triumph of Neptune and Amphrite,” was painted by Nicolas Poussin in 1610 for Cardinal Richelieu’s palace in Paris (later the Palais Royal) and a wall mural was painted by Charles Le Brun at the Louvre Palace in 1661.

On the half landing wall is *The Choice of Hercules*, which is after the painting of the same name by Annibale Carracci in 1596.



The painting shows Hercules flanked by two women who represent his two choices in life. Virtue is on his left urging him to glory through hardship, whilst Pleasure on his right offers him an easier path.

The subject of the mural on the first floor landing is not known. The ceiling mural depicts *The Assembly of the Gods*, a popular theme and the title of a fifteenth century poem. With the mural in the Shell Room it is considered the best painted mural.

Louis Salon/Ballroom

The ceiling mural is not by Laguerre, but was painted in 1981 by the West of England Restoration Studios to complement the Laguerre murals in the rest of the house.

Second Stairway

The six decorative panels by Laguerre are of painted statues of mythological subjects in green-grey monochrome with yellow. There were originally ten in number and were sited around the walls of the hall.



Paul Tsangari conserving the murals January 2019



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