

"WHEN THE
GEORGIAN GROUP
WAS ESTABLISHED,
A HIGH ORDER OF
UPPER-CRUST
INSouciance
REIGNED."

BLAST FROM THE PAST The Young Georgians, Fitzroy Square

On a crisp morning the drawing room on the piano nobile overlooking Fitzroy Square resounds with laughter. Seven friends cluster into silk hose, stacy bodices and dandies' jibbs - historical garb approximating our 21st-century idea of 18th-century fashions. The group then composes itself to be photographed under Reynolds' famous portrayal of that notorious figure, Lady Worsley, in her busses, a scotch riding habit.

"It's undeniably escapism," says the Young Georgians' chairman Oliver Gerrish, dapperly dressed in a tailcoat rivaling that of the portrait over the chimney piece. "The idea is to bring light-hearted appreciation to a period that defined itself by fun and extravagance."

The group is an offshoot of the paint conservation charity that, since the 1930s, has been championing Georgian architecture.

Gerrish re-established the younger membership circle in 2003 to coral like-minded admirers of all things 18th-century. But while he describes himself as a self-trained architectural historian, it would be folly to assume the group was a coalition of kooky historians. Hence, not pedantry, is the esprit de corps behind their visits to historical sites and gatherings at Six Fitzroy Square for music and dancing.

Gerrish, whose day job is as a counterfeiter, has his own take on the Group's distinguished ancestry: "When it was established it was a very social set - people like John Bergenian rubbed shoulders with Nancy Mitford, so a high order of upper-crust

insouciance reigned".

The serious undertow which binds the group is its ongoing education in art and architecture from 1700 to 1840. Members' tours range from those of grand piles like Rousham Hall (seat of the literary Stewarts) to meticulously restored Soho town houses. Their appetite for the authentic, and an extensive contacts list, often takes them to places inaccessible to the public gaze, adding to the appeal of membership, which now numbers more than 350.

At our shoot, most of the mirthful dialogue is amusements around the various props employed. Pop-about-town Henry Conway makes the most of the opportunity afforded by a random twig he is delighted to have identified as pussy willow. Sophie Edmonds, a driving force behind the movement, betrays her day job as a performer as a performer and event planner in the arch manner in which she dollops out tea from an urn.

Edmonds and Gerrish reach the height of their powers at their Townhouse Parties, where themes have included royalist, anarchist and hellfire. The latter's passion for historic architecture has already brimmed over into television appearances, and he makes no secret of his ambition to do more promoting; it seems only a matter of time.

A new generation of informed counter-cultural English amateurs steps up to the plate.

georgiansgroup.org.uk; follow Oliver's blog at architecturism.blogspot.co.uk

MEET THE YOUNG
GEORGIANS - LED BY
OLIVER GERRISH AND
SOPHIE EDMONDS - WHO
DELIGHT IN ALL THINGS
18TH-CENTURY

BY GEORGE!

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room on the *piano nobile* overlooking Fitzroy Square resounds with laughter. Seven friends clamber into silk hose, saucy bodices and dandies' jabots – historical garb approximating our 21st-century idea of 18th-century fashions. The group then composes itself to be photographed under Reynolds' famous portrayal of that notorious figure, Lady Worsley, in her brazen scarlet riding habit.

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