

Vintage chandelier

brightest light



The magnificent restored main chandelier in the Sidholme Hotel Music Room is put together by David and Mandy Wilkinson



PICTURES BY ROGER MALONE

Chandelier is back to bring added sparkle to music room

Roger Malone watches the delicate task of hanging a vintage chandelier

It was a glittering occasion. After a six month period of refurbishment the main star in the Sidholme Hotel Music Room's 'galaxy' of chandeliers is now back - and in sparkling perfection.

It took a whole day, yesterday, for UK premier chandelier expert David Wilkinson and his wife Mandy to unpack numerous labelled boxes and carefully un-rap and place the several thousand pieces of glinting glass back together.

Slowly, methodically the shape began to grow. From the initial stalk which suspends the 12ft chandelier from the ceiling it filled out with prisms, glass bowls and a myriad small octagonal buttons like some opulent glass jigsaw.

Funded by the Friends of Sidholme Music Room, the £20,000 restoration was necessary to preserve the 1850s chandelier from further fatigue and decay.

When it left Sidholme for the Wilkinson's specialist workshop in Kent last year it was in a poor state. A major area of damage were the bowls where misaligned arms containing the candles were rooted precariously in clumps of plaster.

All the metal work was repaired or replaced and re-polished," says David, who holds the Royal Warranty for glass restoration.

"Crystal pieces that were broken were replaced with blown glass from the Isle of Wight, cut and polished in our own workshop.

"There was a lot missing and we had to replace some from our own supplies," he says.

"It was designed for gas and then they used electricity. That conversion was carried out a lot.

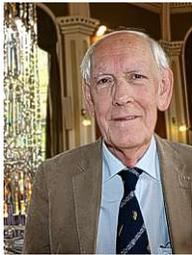
"Most gas chandeliers were converted because they had hollow pipes through."

David says this main chandelier, which is the focal point in the music room's vaulted ceiling, has more historic importance because it is one of a set.

"These chandeliers were all made for the same room. It is unusual to have this quantity all in one room which is fairly small."

However, he says, if such an example of vintage craftsmanship was created today, the estimate would be £1 million.

The hotel, a splendid example of Regency grandeur now known as Sidholme, was built by the 8th Earl of Buckinghamshire as a family home in



Friends chairman, John McGregor

1826 and originally called Richmond Lodge.

The music room was an extension for his wife the Countess Maria Isabella, in 1855, who requested a combined purpose-built private chapel and music room.

An imposing Gray and Davidson organ was installed to fulfil both religious and entertainment requirements - which has also been restored courtesy of the Friends.

At the same time the room had seven chandeliers suspended from the grand ceiling - all at that time gas fuelled.

Now returned, and reinstalled, this main chandelier has also discreetly moved into the modern age with dimmable LED lights. So bright or soft 'candle-lit' social soirees can once again be enjoyed in the 21st century.

Friends Chairman, John McGregor is delighted with the restoration - and also with the LED lights which will, as well as having an aesthetic advantage, also present a big saving.

As a special 'thank you' to those who bought parts for this chandelier as memories to loved ones or to celebrate special events, John says there will be a special presentation of certificates. This will take place on July 13 with patron Dame Alison Carnwath doing the honours.

Yesterday, while the main chandelier was being prepared to be winched back up to bask in its former glory, two smaller ones were winched down. The comparison underlined the amazing difference in condition between pre and post-restoration.

In due course it is hoped to raise sufficient funds to have all the chandeliers conjuring an air of awe - their cut-glass prisms glinting with fleeing rainbow hues as the light refracts through them all.

