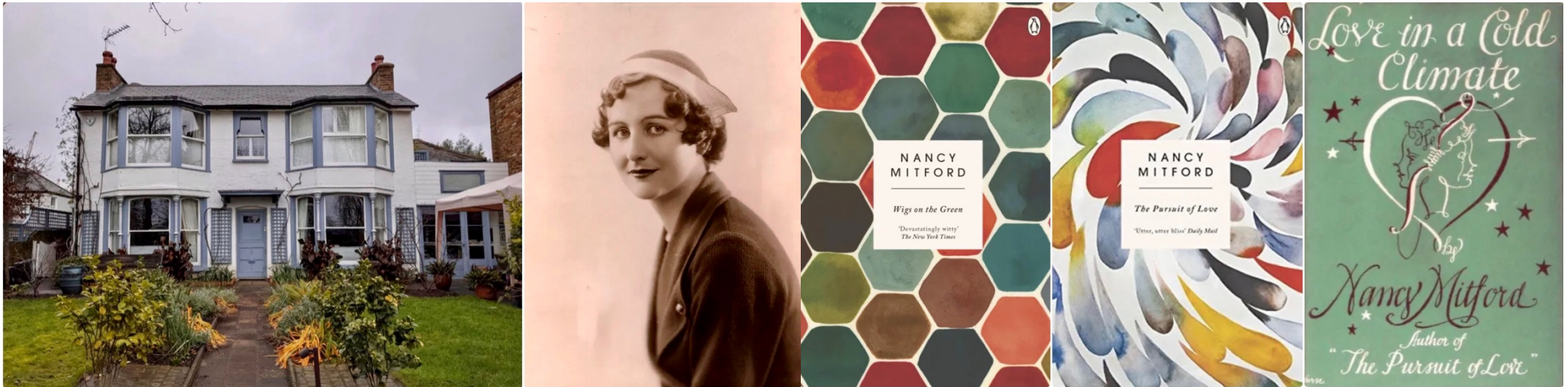


The Chiswick connections of the Mitford Sisters



Rose Cottage, Strand on the Green, photograph Joanna Raikes; Nancy Mitford by Bassano Ltd, October 1932, courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery; book covers: *Wigs on the Green*, *The Pursuit of Love*, *Love In A Cold Climate*. Images (and some words) from *The Chiswick Calendar* profile by Bridget Osborne.

Nancy Mitford lived at Rose Cottage, Strand on the Green in the 1930s. In a letter to an aunt years later she wrote: 'Dear Rose Cottage, I've never liked a house more – I often think of it and the reflection of the river on my bedroom ceiling'.

She was already a published author when she moved to Strand on the Green. By 1934 she was on her third novel *Wigs on the Green*, a satire on the fascist movement of Sir Oswald Mosley, who was to marry her sister **Diana**.

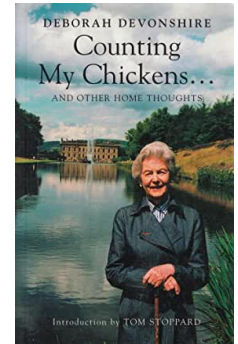
Nancy had briefly flirted with membership of the 'Blackshirts' herself in 1931, but her enthusiasm was short-lived and she soon became an outspoken opponent. In *Wigs on the Green* she sent up her sister **Unity** as Eugenia Malmain, one of the richest girls in England and an ardent supporter of Captain Jack and the Union Jackshirts.

She fell out with **Diana and Unity** over its publication and, when her publishers asked her permission to reprint the book in 1951, she said no. In a letter to Evelyn Waugh she wrote, "Too much has happened for jokes about Nazis to be regarded as funny or as anything but the worst of taste." First published in 1935, it wasn't republished until 2010.

Nancy's youngest sister Deborah was married to the 11th Duke of Devonshire, whose family had owned Chiswick House until 1929, when it was sold by his grandfather to Middlesex County Council.

"It never disappoints or fails to inspire" she wrote in her book, *Counting My Chickens* (right).

'Debo' and her husband lived at the family seat, Chatsworth House, and when some of the furniture was auctioned, two armchairs found their way back to Chiswick House. Dr Esme Whittaker, curator at English Heritage wrote in 2016: "On 2 March, English Heritage acquired at auction a pair of George III painted beech armchairs, with cane backs and seats, for the collection at Chiswick House. The chairs were part of the furnishings and objects that accompanied Deborah, Duchess of Devonshire when she moved from Chatsworth to her last home, The Old Vicarage at Edensor on the Chatsworth estate."



Unity Mitford travelled with her sister Diana to the 1933 Nuremberg Rally, as part of the British delegation from the British Union of Fascists, where she saw Hitler for the first time. Falling in love with him, she wanted to be near Hitler as much as possible, eventually becoming part of his inner circle and forming a close relationship with him.

Chiswick playwright **John Caine** has now written a radio play about **Unity** called *Hitler's Child*, inspired by a TV producer who tried to track down rumours that Unity had given birth to a child in a cottage hospital near Burford and that Hitler was the father. The producer was able to establish that Unity had indeed been a patient at the hospital; but he could not find out whether Unity Mitford had given birth there.

John is not the first to write a play about Unity. **John Mortimer**, father of **Emily** - who adapted, directed and starred in the BBC production of *The Pursuit of Love* - knew the Mitfords and wrote a radio play called *Unity*, as Emily mentions in her interview for the Chiswick Book Festival.

In 1981 he play was produced by BBC Two featuring Lesley Ann Down as **Unity** (right) and Chiswick actor Clare Byam-Shaw as Petra Plowright.

Picture: BBC

