

Enid and Elaine de Chair: Government House and Modernism in Sydney

ANNE SANDERS

Enid de Chair was vice-regal consort of New South Wales from 1924 to 1930. The youngest daughter of Henry William (Hendrik Wilhelm) 'Harry' Struben and Mary Struben (nee Cole of Enniskillen, Ireland), Enid was born at the family farm 'The Willows' on the outskirts of Pretoria in the Transvaal region of South Africa on 24 November 1879. Her father was a successful farmer and trader, her uncle Frederick Struben a geologist. The brothers are credited with the discovery of gold-bearing reefs in Witwatersrand in 1886, resulting in Harry being made the inaugural president of the Chamber of Mines. The Struben brothers were now gold multi-millionaires.

In 1889 Harry Struben sold his mining rights and retired to Rosebank in Cape Town where he built his mansion, Strubenhof in 1890.¹ In 1888, Frederick Struben retired with his family to Britain and in 1901, purchased Spitchwick Manor in Dartmoor, Devon.

Enid was sent to board at Cheltenham Ladies College in Gloucestershire where she displayed an interest in arts and craft as well as music.² Having Uncle Fred and family in Devon would have provided her with some family contact and comfort during those years away from South Africa.

She was given leave from school in June 1897 to attend Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in London. Accompanied by her family, who had travelled from South Africa and her Dutch cousins, her 'diary', written on the back of a school exercise book, records a social whirl of events: her father had secured 'the best seats in town' for the royal procession plus concerts, dinners and polo at the Ranelagh Club.³

Later that year, having finished her schooling, Enid returned to Cape Town and the family estate, Strubenhof. The Strubens kept an open house and entertained many of the elite society of Cape Town and visiting British grandees and luminaries. Cecil Rhodes, then premier of the Cape Colony and a diamond and gold magnate,

was a neighbour on his Groote Schuur estate, and lent one of the houses on his estate, The Woolsack, to poet and writer Rudyard Kipling from 1898 for the poet's annual wintering sojourns.⁴ Kipling and Enid became good friends, maintaining correspondence and visits until his death in 1936.

She befriended Alice Rawson, the daughter of Rear-Admiral Harry Rawson, commander of British naval forces at the Cape of Good Hope and West Coast of Africa Station, based at Simon's Town on the Cape.⁵ In 1898 Enid was invited to stay at Admiralty House where she was introduced to Alice's cousin, the recently appointed Commander Dudley de Chair, flagship commander to the admiral. The enamoured de Chair, single and 15 years Enid's senior, recalls his fascination with this vivacious, intelligent, auburn haired beauty:

Many happy days were spent at her home near Cape Town, where I listened to her playing the organ and piano ... Her bright chestnut hair, English complexion, slim figure and hazel eyes combined with her keenness for sports – swimming, tennis, riding and dancing – all helped to confirm my first impressions. Her character and devotion to both her remarkable parents endeared her to everyone. To see a seasoned statesman like Cecil Rhodes pouring out his aims for education to her, others waiting for a chance for extra dances, roused interest too.⁶

As the second Boer War (1899-1902) dragged on, Harry Struben took his wife and two of their daughters, Edith and Enid, on a round-the-world voyage. They visited Australia, New Zealand and Japan, eventually arriving in Britain. While in Sydney in mid-1902, they were reunited with the Rawsons, whom they had known at the Cape. Admiral Sir Harry Rawson had recently been appointed Governor of New South Wales, and was living at the State Government House, Cranbrook, at Double Bay.⁷ It was a chance for Enid and Alice to catch up. Dudley de Chair had been recalled to England to be commander of the Channel Fleet flagship in 1899.

Towards the end of 1902, now Captain and while in preparation to go the United States as Naval Attaché to the British Embassy, de Chair received a letter from Enid to say that she and the family would be visiting Fred and Mabel Struben in Torquay and asking him to join them. Enid and Dudley had not seen each other for four years. They announced their engagement and were married within two months on 21 April 1903, at Holy Trinity Church Torquay, departing almost immediately for New York and Newport, Rhode Island, 'where the British Embassy had taken up residence for the summer' along with New York high society.⁸

The de Chairs' two-year posting in the US diplomatic circuit saw them moving in an exalted social milieu; at that time, the French and British embassies occupied the most important positions in Washington. Both Enid and Dudley were born in Dominions of the British Empire, South Africa and Canada respectively, and considered themselves first and foremost, British. For Enid, her first two years of married life

were a social whirl of dinner parties, dances, 'at homes' and other engagements.

With the imminent birth of their first child and Dudley's request to return to sea service, they left for England in mid-1905. Severe complications with the birth induced Enid and then Dudley, to become Christian Scientists, to which they remained faithful for the rest of their lives. Baby Henry Graham and mother were delivered safely.⁹ Her second child, a daughter Elaine, was born in 1907, followed by her third, a son, Somerset, in 1911. Following the youngest child's birth and Dudley's return to sea, Enid and the children spent a year in South Africa with her family.

Enid's interests extended to interior design and oriental collectables.¹⁰ She enjoyed buying and redecorating old houses either for the family or for sale.¹¹ The family home was a Tudor manor house, 'Lynwood Chase' in Bracknell, Berkshire, about nine miles from Windsor Castle, close to Royal Ascot and with London in easy reach by car and train. She also bought an old millhouse in Cornwall which was converted into a comfortable seaside holiday cottage. Their London base was a townhouse in fashionable Ennismore Gardens, Knightsbridge.

During the long war years, Enid was actively involved in organising warm clothing parcels for the Navy League, particularly Dudley's men:

3 doz. prs warm socks for your men. When I see what I have over I'll send more. Now we are knitting those warm tummy belts and will send as soon as done. We have some nightshirts ready too.¹²

Food shortages resulted from German U-boat blockades; Somerset recalled collecting 'dandelion leaves and nettles for making into salads' and in one of her letters, Enid added, 'We still go on bottling fruit and making jam.'¹³ She was also a good seamstress, making all the children's clothes. However, when it came to formal attire, she did have a Parisian couturier (an ex-cutter from the House of Worth) who designed her more striking outfits.

Dudley de Chair's naval and diplomatic career saw him promoted to Rear-Admiral and knighted in 1914, elevating Enid to Lady de Chair. His friendship with King George V extended back to their time as naval cadets – de Chair had also been the King's naval aide-de-camp in 1911 – and, given the de Chairs' proximity to Windsor Castle, they were invited to court for dinner and also hosted the King's sister, Princess Louise, for tea at 'Lynwood Chase'.¹⁴

Australia

On 8 November 1923, King George V appointed his friend Admiral Sir Dudley Rawson Stratford de Chair as the 25th Governor of New South Wales, a position that Dudley's favourite uncle, Admiral Sir Harry Rawson, had held to great esteem between 1902 and 1909.¹⁵ Enid immediately consulted Alice Rawson and Lady



Sir Dudley and Lady Enid de Chair arrive in Sydney to take up residence at Government House – 'her happiest home' – in 1924. (Courtesy Colin de Chair)

Davidson, the widowed past governor's wife, regarding finding household staff and a private secretary for the Governor. The de Chairs arrived in Sydney on 28 February 1924. Enid was now the chatelaine of Government House, overlooking the Botanic Gardens and Sydney Harbour, rather than Cranbrook, which had been the Rawsons' residence during their tenure.

The de Chairs arrived in Sydney – then the second largest city in the British Empire (comprising 20 per cent of the total Australian population) – at a time of post-war expansion.¹⁶ By 1920, the fashionable eastern suburbs were directly linked by tram to the city; an underground electric railway system from Central Station to St James was completed in 1926; the first radio stations began broadcasting in 1923 with commercial licences operating in 1925; Governor de Chair laid the foundation stone for the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1925; several luxurious new theatres and cinemas opened, presenting the latest in international concerts, theatre and films. Expanded retail emporiums, especially David Jones' elegant Elizabeth Street store, which opened in 1927, catered to the new emancipated woman. The Strand Arcade, housing elegant shops and fashionable photographic studios, was also home to Sydney's best nightclub, The Ambassadors Café. A new Christian Scientist church was opened in Darlinghurst in 1927, to which Lady de Chair was a regular attendee.

Lady de Chair regarded Government House as her happiest home. Certainly, her organisational talents were brought to the fore. In many ways, the success of the governorship was based upon this close and supportive partnership between the vice-regal couple. Like the Rawsons before them, the de Chairs travelled New South Wales extensively, particularly to remote areas of the state. Enid was quickly favoured by the press for her charm: 'Australia is going to like Lady de Chair. She has a delightful personality and is intensely alive.'¹⁷ The Governor himself echoed: 'She is a great help to me, as she has long been accustomed to Government House ways in South Africa, so she knows the right thing to do.'¹⁸

In those early years, Sir Dudley recognised his wife's behind-the-scenes contribution: 'I soon found out that there can be no position requiring more tact and ability than that of the Wife of the Governor coming into a strange community, where there are inevitably opposing factions in every walk of life.'¹⁹ Her support would have been invaluable during the constitutional crisis brought about by the Labor Premier Jack Lang, who had sent a delegation to England seeking to have de Chair recalled.

The two youngest children arrived in December 1924 on the ship *Diogenes*. Thirteen-year-old Somerset was sent to The King's School at Parramatta, while only daughter, Elaine, aged 18, began an arts degree at the University of Sydney.²⁰ Their eldest son, Graham, was away on naval duty. He joined the family in 1929, their last year in Sydney, as his father's aide-de-camp, eventually accompanying them on their long return to the United Kingdom. The younger de Chair children had joined

the *Diogenes* at Cape Town, after spending three months with various Struben relatives in South Africa. On board, Elaine befriended Bethia Anderson, returning to live in Australia with her parents, Ethel and Brigadier-General Austin Anderson; unknown then, the Andersons would play an important role in the official and unofficial social life of the Governor's family.²¹

Sydney offered the vice-regal family opportunities to pursue their favoured sporting activities – swimming, surfing, tennis, riding, cricket matches, sailing, horse racing and polo.²² By marriage Lady de Chair was related to the Hordern retailing family: they offered the vice-regal family the use of their beach house 'Kalua' at Palm Beach.²³ True to her style, this provided Lady de Chair with three splendid entertaining venues: Government House overlooking Sydney Harbour; 'Hillview' at Moss Vale, the Governor's official summer residence; and the more intimate and casual 'Kalua'.



The de Chair family at Government House, Sydney, 1928: Elaine, Graham and Somerset, Sir Dudley and Lady Enid. (Photograph courtesy of Diana Daly, Elaine De Chair's daughter)

Hostesses with the mostest

Like her parents at Strubenholm in South Africa, Enid de Chair entertained often. Given the difficulty experienced in finding good staff, she managed a very full social calendar of official and more informal dinner parties, cocktail soirees, 'at homes', afternoon teas, garden parties, dances and pageants at Government House as well as dinners and household guests at 'Hillview' in the Southern Highlands. The



Lady de Chair trained her daughter to take an active role at Government House: Elaine and Lady Enid de Chair, 1928. (Photograph courtesy of Diana Daly, Elaine de Chair's daughter)

de Chairs' arrival in 1924, with some English domestic staff, was met with torrid newspaper headlines: 'The Governor brings English servants to Sydney to take the bread out of Australian mouths and pays them slavery wages!' The butler advised the de Chairs to double their staff wages.²⁴ Government House was frequently the scene of garden parties and afternoon teas with casts of thousands, overseen by Lady de Chair.

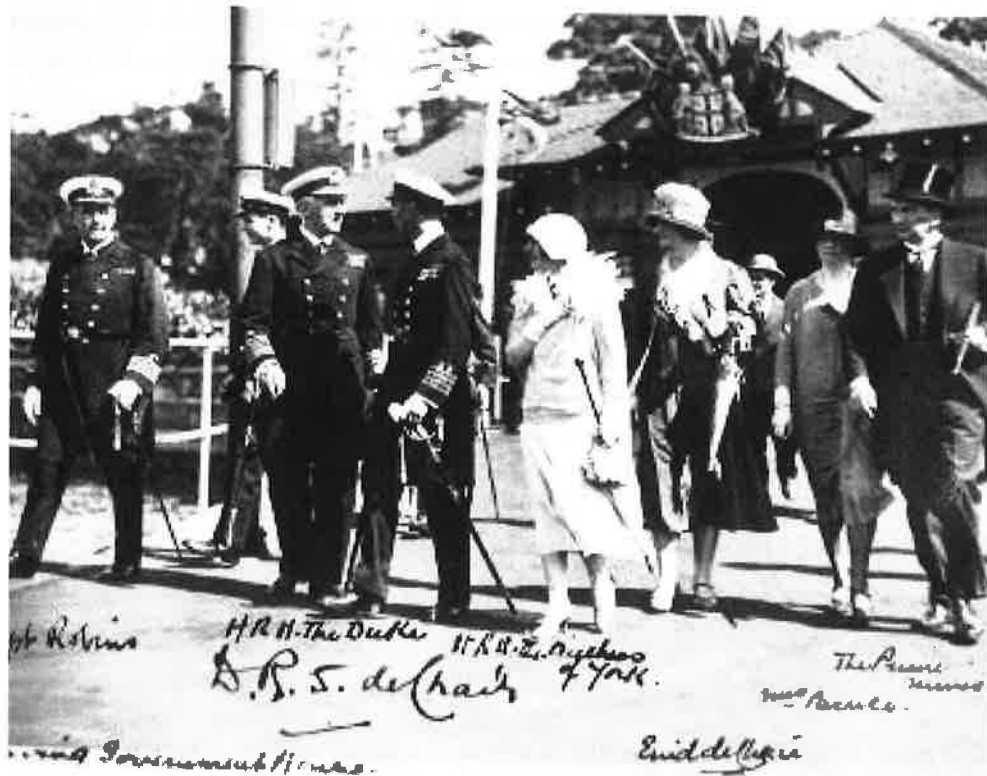
The worlds of mother and daughter intersected. Emblematic of women's increasing independence, both Lady de Chair and Elaine drove Crossley touring cars with crown number plates. Enid trained her daughter, involving her, particularly after her coming of age, in hostessing at Government House and vice-regal events; giving speeches, opening fetes, organising pageants and fund-raising balls. Elaine's attendance at the University of Sydney introduced a wider set of interesting academics to the de Chairs' social circle, including Professor Radcliff-Brown, a noted anthropologist, and Arthur Sadler, professor of Oriental studies, himself a great supporter of younger modernist artists. The Chancellor, Sir William Cullen, was already known to them as the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Justice, and his daughter Ailsa Cullen was a contemporary of Elaine's in the Arts Faculty at the university.²⁵

Sydney's temperate climate suited outdoor sports: tennis meets were frequent on Government House's three courts, as were sailing picnics of which the vice-regal couple frequently partook. During a holiday with her mother in Hawaii, Elaine learnt to surf and returned to Sydney with long board in tow, and proceeded to teach her elder brother to surf at Palm Beach. There is a grainy black and white newspaper photograph of Elaine, in a wet one-piece bathing suit standing, beaming, with her upright long board on the beach.²⁶ The sense of youthful openness, independence and *joie de vivre* radiates from this picture.

Lady and Elaine de Chair's support for women's organisations – CWA, Red Cross, Girl Guides, YWCA, Girls' Week, mothers and babies homes and the many women's clubs including the Feminist Club – was tireless. Elaine was being trained for a public role in life. She frequently accompanied her parents on their train tours of regional New South Wales.

Shortly after their arrival in Sydney, the vice-regal couple undertook their first regional tour to far western New South Wales. The Governor soon realised that Australians loved speeches, lots of them. Out of his league, he acknowledged his wife could compete with the best of the 'silver-tongued orators'.²⁷ Enid had a penchant for public speaking and was frequently sought after for her wit and charm. Poor Sir Dudley. A newspaper report of a luncheon at the New South Wales Journalists Institute crowed: 'As a speaker Lady de Chair completely eclipsed her husband. The oratorical contrast, unfortunately for his Excellency, was the more striking when both spoke at the same function.'²⁸

Sometimes Lady de Chair's forthright manner – magnified by her imposing stature – though offered with the best of intentions, could be misconstrued by lesser



Royal visit to Sydney, March 1927, left to right: Captain Robins, Governor Dudley de Chair (in front), HRH the Duke of York, HRH the Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth), Lady de Chair, Mrs Bruce and Prime Minister Stanley Bruce.
(Courtesy Colin de Chair)

mortals. Bethia Anderson recalled her mother, Mrs Ethel Anderson, being asked for advice by a perplexed Lady de Chair:

Mrs. Anderson I've noticed Mrs Lloyd [the shy wife of a new honorary ADC] seems to be avoiding me. Can you think why? All I did was to point out that her Australian accent was so appalling, she must be a sad drag on his career. I assured her it could be rectified, and even offered to give her a course of lessons in elocution from a very good woman who told me ... that she would regard it as a challenge. How can Mrs Lloyd be other than grateful? What could I have said to upset her?²⁹

Visitors

Governor and Lady de Chair hosted several important dignitaries and delegations at Government House in the years 1926 to 1928. These included Lord Burnham, editor of the London *Daily Telegraph* and head of the Empire Media Conference, which met in Melbourne in 1926. In a humorous speech to the

journalists club, Lady de Chair recounted meeting his lordship in his bathroom at Government House, as he had asked to see a platypus and she had done her best to secure one; it was put in his bathtub.

This was followed in 1927 with the visit of the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth), in Australia to open the new Parliament House in Canberra. The royal party of some 70 extra members and staff stayed at Government House for 10 days; the de Chairs surrendering their private rooms to the Duke and Duchess.

Sir Dudley noted his wife's extraordinary organisational abilities in regard to this visit: many of the staff were housed in tents on the lawn. Although the royal couple's schedule was hectic, when an evening proved free, it was Lady de Chair and Elaine who quickly organised a dance for 200 young people, requested by the Duke, at Government House; Elaine worked her way through her younger set list. Lady de Chair then oversaw the arrangement of a garden party in honour of their Royal Highnesses for some 6000 guests on the lawns of Government House.



Elaine de Chair, in front, as a princess with attendants for a charity play, 'The Prince who was a Piper', taken in the gardens at Government House, June 1929. (Photograph courtesy of Diana Daly, Elaine de Chair's daughter)

The vice-regal couple entertained, and were entertained by, Prince Nobuhito Takamatsu, brother of the Emperor of Japan, who was on a training mission to Sydney with the Japanese Navy. He had been taught by Professor Sadler at the Peers School in Tokyo, so Sadler and Elaine, with her young women friends, were invited to help entertain him. When asked how he enjoyed his visit, the Prince responded, 'Oh yes, it was very nice, it was very geisha.'³⁰ Hilarious as it seemed to Elaine and her friends, the very upright Japanese Consul General Tokugawa, whose daughter was engaged to the Prince, was not so amused.

The arts

Lady de Chair carved her own distinctive path within Sydney society, particularly given her interest in music and art: the vice-regal couple and their daughter were invited to all first night and opening events. Sydney's cultural scene was rich – following the austerity of the war and immediate post-war years – with a budding silent film industry and J. C. Williamson's theatrical presentations. International stars such as ballerina Anna Pavlova, 'Queen of Song' Dame Nellie Melba and Ignacy Paderewski – world famous pianist and first Prime Minister of Poland – graced its theatres.

The network of sea routes that connected Australia to Europe, England, America, Canada, Japan, Singapore and through to India meant that Sydney was on the touring route for many theatrical, operatic and ballet productions. Visiting American and British film stars were also a regular feature. Many of these dignitaries and their agents were invited to Government House dinners and many musical evening 'at homes' and concerts were given in the ballroom at Government House.³¹

Elaine's interest in acting, along with her social connections within the Younger Set, brought her into the orbit of the McDonough sisters, an entrepreneurial trio, making critically acclaimed films. Their father had been the senior medical officer to the J. C. Williamson Company, which afforded them entrée to leading Australian and international performers. Elaine played the part of Louise Nash in the sisters' third film, *The Cheaters*, the opening scenes of which were filmed at Palm Beach. Given a vice-regal premiere, the Governor was reported to have wept during the film.³²

Elaine joined her friend Bethia Anderson, painters Grace Cossington Smith, Roy de Mestre and Roland Wakelin – members of Sydney's Contemporary Group – and other young women friends under Ethel Anderson's direction, forming the Turrumurra Wall Painters with the purpose of seeking mural commissions. The one extant commission by this group is the beautifully restored Children's Chapel in the crypt of St James Church in King Street Sydney.

The November 1929 issue of the women's style magazine, *The Home*, included an illustrated article on the wall painters, a photograph of Lady de Chair's recently completed Chinoiserie themed, three-panelled silk embroidered screen which was

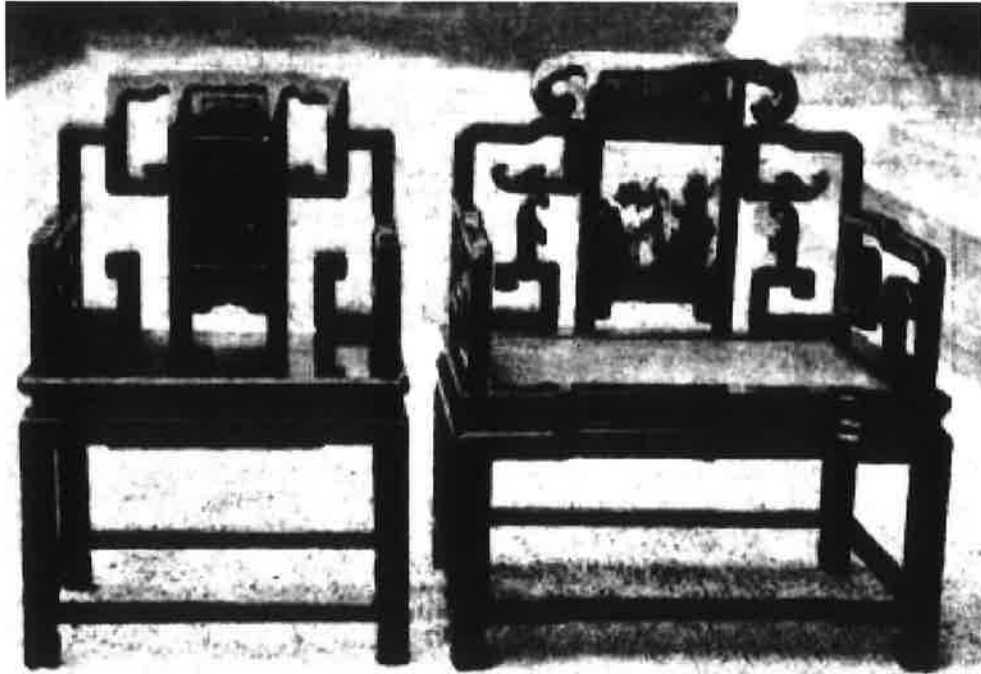
exhibited in the Society of Arts and Crafts, as well as society portrait photographs of Sydney's Younger Set including Elaine, Bethia Anderson, Ailsa Cullen and one of Lady de Chair by Harold Cazneaux in the grounds of Government House.³³ Mother and daughter de Chair were also reported in this same issue as 'have[ing] contracted the habit of attending private parties'; they were guests at a ball at the Horderns' Retford Hall in Darling Point.

Together with Ethel Anderson, the wife of Governor de Chair's private secretary, Brigadier-General Austin Anderson, Lady de Chair was an active supporter of many of the younger modernist artists, particularly Roy de Mestre (later Roy de Maistre). As well as purchasing works and opening his exhibition in 1926 – where she declared that 'modern art has come to stay' – she introduced de Mestre to her wide social circle, including him at many Government House soirees. De Mestre's commissioned portrait of the Governor was hung in the 1929 Archibald Prize and subsequently acquired for the Government House collection. She bought works by Margaret Preston and Roland Wakelin, opened an exhibition by Preston at Grosvenor Galleries and entertained many artists at Government House, including establishment figures such as George Lambert.

Acknowledged as a pet project, her support of the 1929 Burdekin House exhibition (managed and co-ordinated by de Mestre) which principally featured furnished rooms portraying different eras (much of the furniture and decorations being sourced from wealthy private collectors in Sydney), as well as modern rooms designed by many of the artists she supported, it was possibly an ambitious claim by some of Sydney's cultural cognoscenti for a museum of decorative and applied art in Sydney.³⁴

Lady de Chair's impact on the interior decoration of Government House was somewhat constrained by the state budget. She was clearly aware of the value and significance of a Wedgwood 'Australia Flora' dinner set (c1883) that had been offered to her by Captain Charles Campbell Lloyd.³⁵ However, in correspondence with the principal librarian of the Public Library of New South Wales, William Ifould (another ceramic collector), she lamented that she could not see the state government agreeing to the collection's purchase for Government House and that it would be a pity if this set left the country.³⁶ She did make the newspapers when she remodelled an ancient Chinese papier-mache chandelier that she had 'discovered', into several smaller electric lamp stands and shades for Government House.³⁷ She also managed to find funds to re-upholster the 'Hillview' lounge suites and chairs.

An avid collector, Lady de Chair's abiding interest in Chinoiserie and oriental design would have been nurtured through her association with such scholars as Arthur Sadler, Professor of Oriental Studies at University of Sydney (who had a Japanese tea house and garden at his residence in Warrawee); the architect Hardy Wilson and Professor E. G. Waterhouse's interest in Japanese camellias. Wilson's



Lady de Chair was a keen collector of Chinoiserie, including these two throne-like Chinese chairs at Government House, Sydney. ('Chinese Furniture at Government House', Sydney Mail, September 19, 1928, p 29; retrieved October 22, 2019, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article158402080>)

fusion of western and oriental architectural styles was evident in his design of the tennis pavilion at Waterhouse's Gordon home, Eryldene.³⁸ She alerted the State Librarian, William Ifould, in a 1930 letter to a museum quality ceramic collection in private hands that included Sung pottery.³⁹ Bethia Anderson recalled that prior to the de Chairs' departure for London in 1930, Lady de Chair had purchased a set of Chinese scholar chairs and tables that she had seen in a Chinese restaurant in Sydney; the furniture returned home with her.⁴⁰

The long return home

The four de Chairs – Governor and Lady de Chair, their eldest son Graham who for the past year had worked as his father's aide-de-camp, and Elaine – departed Sydney on 13 April 1930. The youngest son Somerset was already at Oxford. In the month before departure, Lady de Chair was entertained by nearly every women's organisation; there were newspaper reports of her being showered with farewell gifts, including a poem dedicated to her by Mrs Mary Gilmore (later Dame).⁴¹ Elaine attended many of these farewell functions with her mother.

Both women had made a significant impact not only on Sydney society and country New South Wales, but also with their patronage of many causes that supported women and girls' welfare. Some months after their departure, a *Sun* newspaper report declared 'Sydney Girls Lack Leaders. Elaine de Chair missed', and followed with a quote from her friend Bethia Anderson extolling Elaine's capabilities: 'Enthusiasm, boundless energy, an apparent tirelessness; any amount of ideas, and sufficient strength of character to get people to carry them out.'⁴²

The return home to Britain was an extended trip of the Far East, as it would have been known then, and the United States – Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, China, a month in Japan, Hawaii, San Francisco, Los Angeles and across America to New York, where they departed for London. In full detective-collector mode, Lady de Chair shanghai-ed the Governor of Singapore's amah (maid) and a car, and with Elaine in tow, scoured the old Chinese quarter finding some remarkable treasures that would furnish their new home in England.⁴³ She scored well in Beijing (Peking) as well.

The trip was a great adventure – Enid and Elaine were carried in sedan chairs up Fujisan, they visited the Angkor Wat temple complex in Cambodia – and they met with many luminaries and celebrities: HJH the Empress of Japan and in Hollywood they lunched and dined with leading Hollywood film stars, Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Elaine was given a screen test, which perhaps gently convinced her that acting was not really her forte.

Home at last

Roy de Maistre (as he now styled himself since leaving Australia) followed the de Chairs to England in 1930 where Lady de Chair commissioned him to design a series of orientalist-themed, painted panels (now in the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection) for the dining room of their London apartment at Carrington House, Mayfair.⁴⁴

Back in England, aged 66, Dudley de Chair was now ready for retirement. Enid on the other hand set about finding their new country house. In 1930 she purchased a complex of old farm buildings on what had been the Wentworth Estate in Surrey and had these converted into a large house which she named Podenhale.⁴⁵ Like her previous estate in Berkshire, Podenhale was located within eight miles of Windsor Castle, near Windsor Great Park, Runnymede of Magna Carta fame and Ascot Racecourse. Her orientalist decorative theme for the new house included her travelling cache of treasures: 'Of all the Chinese and other bargains I acquired in 1930 in Sydney and en route to Hawaii, all have found the right places and been much admired.'⁴⁶ Extending into the garden, she designed and had built a Chinese moon gate; an image of which appears in Roy de Maistre's orientalist murals painted for their London apartment.⁴⁷

The three children married within quick succession: Somerset, the youngest, who had become an MP, was the first in 1932; followed by Graham, who married in December 1936 (the day after King Edward VIII abdicated); and finally Elaine, who married in June 1937 with two of her Australian friends included as bridesmaids.

Elaine, who was working for the publications committee of the League of Nations, had met her future husband at the 1934 Runnymede Pageant of which Lady de Chair was the principal organiser.⁴⁸ In trademark style, the pageant was a celebration of British democracy and was to intended to raise funds for local hospitals and charities. A leading producer was secured, the then Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII) was the patron and dignitaries such as Lord Athlone (a great friend of the de Chairs and previously Governor General of South Africa) and the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George VI and Queen Elizabeth) attended.⁴⁹

However, although it had record attendances and drew on a local cast of 5000 plus 200 horses, it did not recoup all costs. The de Chairs had underwritten the event. Newspapers back in Australia reported an allegation by an Egham councillor that the pageant was not a fundraiser but a benefit to shareholders. Lady de Chair retorted that the guarantee of £6000 was from her late father's estate and that if it was not successful 'it will wreck my husband and myself'.⁵⁰

In November 1934, London's theatre world was enchanted by a new play *Lady Precious Stream*. Touted as a 'traditional Chinese play' (it was not), nonetheless it revived interest in 'all things Chinese' and ran for three years in London.⁵¹ Lady de Chair's interest in modern theatre and Chinoiserie brought her into this orbit. She had lent the production the use of an exquisite Chinese robe for the executioner's costume 'the likes of which has not been known to pass out of China'.⁵²

In her reminiscences, much later, Lady de Chair mused that 'on our return to live in England, all these things soon faded into the background for Dudley and me'.⁵³ Sir Dudley de Chair died in Brighton, Sussex in 1958. Lady de Chair lived another eight years, dying in London in 1966 aged 86 years.

During their vice-regal tenure, both de Chair women were acknowledged as having played important roles as active, modern, forthright women – Elaine as the enthusiastic and energetic leader of Sydney's Younger Set, and Enid as a motivational speaker, hostess of the first rank, remembered fondly by many of the country people of New South Wales and noted for her active support and encouragement of younger modernist Australian artists. Australia, and the Pacific, were a great adventure for them both; for Lady de Chair, as chatelaine of Sydney's Government House by the glorious harbour, it was her happiest home.

Member RAHS

Notes

- 1 Referred to by Rudyard Kipling incorrectly as Strubenheim, the house and grounds were gifted to the University of Witwatersrand, now housing the South African Conservatorium of Music.
- 2 Diana Daly email to author, 22 July 2017 (granddaughter of Enid de Chair).
- 3 Enid Struben, diary notes Jubilee Week 1897, typed by Diana Daly.
- 4 Dan Jacobson, 'Kipling in South Africa', in *London Review of Books* vol 29 no 11, June 2007: <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n11/dan-jacobson/kipling-in-south-africa>, accessed 13 September 2017.
- 5 In 1902, Admiral Sir Harry Rawson was appointed 21st Governor of New South Wales.
- 6 Dudley de Chair, *The Sea is Strong: with a preface and epilogue by Somerset de Chair*, Harrap, London, 1961, p 110.
- 7 'An Ideal Governor', *Sun*, 10 November 1923, p 6.
- 8 de Chair, *The Sea is Strong*, pp 118, 120.
- 9 Diana Daly, email to author, 22 July 2017.
- 10 Lady de Chair recalled, 'As I had a [flair?] from 1902 onwards for Chinese embroideries and brasses etc, I collected a fair amount.' Transcript of handwritten memoir by Lady de Chair c1961. In the possession of Diana Daly, Ireland.
- 11 Transcript of handwritten memoir by Lady de Chair c1961. In the possession of Diana Daly.
- 12 Quote from a letter from Enid de Chair to Dudley de Chair (undated), in email from Diana Daly to author, 19 October 2017.
- 13 Somerset de Chair, *Morning Glory: memoirs from the edge of history*, Cassell Publishers, London, 1994, p 1; Letter from Enid de Chair to Dudley de Chair 24 September 1914, in the possession of Diana Daly.
- 14 Somerset de Chair, *Morning Glory*, p 3.
- 15 Sir Dudley de Chair noted: 'The King invited Enid and me to an afternoon tea party at Buckingham Palace where we met many ex-Governors and their wives, who apparently had been asked to meet us and impart information and advice.' Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs* vol VI (Australia 1), Chapter 1, Governor of New South Wales, p 4, AJCP reel M716, held at National Library of Australia and Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW.
- 16 Richard Maltby, Daniel Biltereyst, Philippe Meers (eds), *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, Chichester West Sussex, 2011, p 143
- 17 Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, AJCP reel M716, p 21.
- 18 Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, p 33.
- 19 Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, p 31.
- 20 According to a report in the *Tweed Daily*, 4 December 1924, p 4, Elaine de Chair 'will probably enter the Women's College [University of Sydney] next term'.
- 21 Bethia Foote, *Ethel and the Governors' General: a biography of Ethel Anderson (1883-1958) and Brigadier-General A. T. Anderson*, Rainforest Publishing, Paddington NSW, 1992, p 116.
- 22 Eldest son Graham, now a naval officer, would not join them until the last year of their posting, as the governor's aide-de-camp (ADC).
- 23 Enid's brother, Charles Struben's wife Valerie's sister was married to a Hordern. Somerset de Chair, *Morning Glory*, p 20.
- 24 Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, p 9.

- 25 Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, p 17.
- 26 'Vice-regal surf riders', *Western Mail*, 20 March 1930, p 3.
- 27 Admiral Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, p 24.
- 28 'Met in Bathroom', *Evening News* (Rockhampton, Qld), 14 April 1930, p 12.
- 29 Foote, *Ethel and the Governors' General*, p 136.
- 30 Mrs Elaine Barrington-Hudson (née de Chair) reminiscences recorded London, 1996, transcript, p 9. Caroline Simpson Library and Resource Centre, the Mint, Sydney.
- 31 Mrs Elaine Barrington-Hudson reminiscences, 1996, transcript, p 6.
- 32 'When three dashing sisters made a movie', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 21 April, 1971, p 4.
- 33 *The Home*, vol 8, no 11, November 1927, pp 9, 22-3. This issue contained numerous portrait photographs of many of Sydney's Younger Set, friends of Elaine plus articles by Ethel and Bethia Anderson and a Harold Cazneaux portrait photograph of Lady de Chair in the grounds of Government House. View online: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-381738099/view?partId=nla.obj-381890797#page/n0/mode/1up>, accessed 28 September 2017.
- 34 'Art treasures at Burdekin House', *Evening News*, 8 October 1929, p 10.
- 35 Letter from Lady de Chair to W. H. Ifould, 21 December 1926, Ad 86, State Library of New South Wales.
- 36 Three pieces from this collection are in the Powerhouse Museum collection: <https://collection.maas.museum/object/414968>, accessed 23 September 2017.
- 37 'A Chinese Chandelier at Government House', *Sydney Mail*, 5 September 1928, p 28.
- 38 In a typed transcript of one of her hand-written memoirs (dated by her daughter Diana Daly as c 1961), Lady de Chair noted that she had a 'flair from 1902 onwards [the date of her round-the-world trip with her family, [prior to her marriage] for Chinese embroideries and brasses etc. I collected a fair amount'. Clearly her interest in oriental design and craftsmanship was fostered by her association with these scholarly contacts. Lady de Chair handwritten memoir circa 1961, typed by Diana Daly.
- 39 Letter from Lady de Chair to W. H. Ifould, 18 April 1930, Ad 86, State Library of New South Wales.
- 40 'Chinese furniture at Government House', *Sydney Mail*, 19 September 1928, p 29.
- 41 'Poem for Lady de Chair', *Sun*, 5 April 1930, p 7.
- 42 'Sydney Girls Lack Leaders. Elaine de Chair missed', *Sun*, 14 September 1930, p 33.
- 43 '1930 from Sydney and Brisbane to USA and England', Lady de Chair handwritten memoir, c 1961, typed by Diana Daly.
- 44 Roy de Maistre, *Moon Gate Garden*, early 1930s; <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/2.1992.1/>, accessed 29 September 2017.
- 45 'A brief history of Wentworth Estate, Virginia Water 29th June 2002', Virginia Water Community Website: <https://www.virginiawater.org.uk/scr/histlist.php?locid=&bid=19>, accessed 28 September 2017.
- 46 '1930 from Sydney and Brisbane to USA and England', Lady de Chair handwritten memoir, c 1961, typed by Diana Daly.
- 47 'Lady de Chair handwritten memoir circa 1961', typed by Diana Daly. See Roy de Maistre's *Moon Gate Garden* image: https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/?document_id=3032, accessed 29 September 2017.
- 48 'Miss Elaine de Chair', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 January, 1934, p 13.

49 'The 1934 Runnymede Pageant', Medieval Manuscripts blog: <http://blogs.bl.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/2015/04/the-1934-runnymede-pageant.html>, accessed 29 September 2017.

50 'Runnymede Pageant. Lady de Chair Refutes Allegation', *Argus*, 17 May 1934, p 10.

51 D. Yeh, 'Staging China, Excising the Chinese: Lady Precious Stream and the darker side of Chinoiserie', in A. Witchard (ed), *British Modernism and Chinoiserie*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015, p 1.

52 Yeh, 'Staging China', p 10.

53 'Enid, Lady de Chair Reminiscences Notables, etc p 4', Transcript of handwritten memoir by Lady de Chair c 1961. In the possession of Diana Daly.