

Sensitive property restorer and founder of art collection

Daniel Hearsun, 62

In the mid-1990s Pembroke Lodge, a once magnificent Georgian mansion in Richmond Park, southwest London, stood largely derelict. Built at the highest point of the park, it had been passed to Lord John Russell, the prime minister, by Queen Victoria in 1847, and he used it to entertain a glittering list of foreign royalty, aristocrats and writers. Russell died there in 1878.

More than a hundred years later the chartered surveyor and property developer Daniel Hearsun learnt through an advertisement in *Estates Gazette* that the dilapidated building was being put out to tender. At the time Daniel was in low health, as indeed were his finances. Yet by 1998, having won the contract over heftier competitors owing to his experience with listed buildings, he learnt that the lodge was his to renovate.

It was a mammoth project, involving for Daniel a round-the-clock seven-day workload. The mansion's grade II listed status and location in a royal park brought its own planning complications but over the years he turned the rundown café into elegant tea rooms, renovated a suite of rooms above them and added an extension for use as a wedding or conference venue. His family lived initially above the café, but eventually won planning permission to renovate a small dwelling near by.

Daniel Hearsun was born in Wimbledon, southwest London, in 1958, and into a family of chartered surveyors. His mother, Olivia (née Spence), had been a secretary and his father, John, worked as a chartered surveyor for Thames Water. His elder brothers, John and Simon, would also become chartered surveyors and by the late 1980s the family would go into business together.

A bright child, presumed to be heading for Oxford or Cambridge by his headmaster at King's College School, Wimbledon, Daniel nonetheless opted not to take the university route and, leaving school at 17, set about looking for a job in property. A South Audley Street firm took him on and he stayed there until



Daniel Hearsun restored Pembroke Lodge in Richmond Park and, right, came first in a round-the-world sailing rally

the age of 25. It was a steep learning curve. He was put in charge of discovering rundown buildings in central London, assessing their value and placing offers, and it built his appetite for development. When in the early 1980s his father retired and suggested that the two go into business, he leapt at the opportunity.

It was an exciting period in property, and for a time Daniel and his brothers, who would join the firm a few years later, did well. The team started small and moved on to larger projects. A building comprising five flats on the King's Road caught Daniel's eye and after renovation he sold four and kept one.

On the horizon, however, were spiralling interest rates and the looming housing crash of the early 1990s. Daniel suggested that the

family sell the complete portfolio, but he was overruled and ensuing attempts to ride out the financial storm fundered.

In 1987 Daniel had married Jane Thomas, a former secretary and British Caledonian stewardess, and they had four children: Louise, who is a director of the company; Sarah, who works in communications in Canada; Charlie, a chartered surveyor; and Katie, who works in effective altruism. After the crash they sold the family home overlooking Wimbledon Common and moved into a rented property in nearby Merton Park.

For a few years, getting back on his feet, Daniel worked on a number of small property projects until he saw the advertisement for Pembroke

Lodge. It would mark a changing point in his life. On top of the renovation he became a leading member of the Friends of Richmond Park, was a trustee of London in Bloom and started the Hearsun Collection.

A large-scale project over about 20 years, the collection involved Daniel's participation in auctions around the world collecting some 8,000 artefacts relating to the royal parks, specifically Richmond and the lodge. They include the 18th-century carriage tokens used by the public for getting around the park, a chair belonging to the Russell family and the military medals of the "Phantom Squad" that based itself at the lodge during the Second World War.

For several years Daniel campaigned for a Heritage Pavilion in the park to showcase the collection but was disappointed to learn in 2019 that it was not to be.

In the 1990s Daniel qualified as a Yachtmaster Ocean sailor and as an antidote to property

development would spend up to eight weeks traversing the globe. He took part in, and won, the World Arc round-the-world rally and sailed with his family in the Caribbean, Seychelles and Europe.

Popular, gregarious, always dressed in a blue

blazer, Daniel was a widely recognised figure, prepared to go the extra mile for what he believed in. He had had his fill of disappointment in the business but he kept bitterness at bay and looked for the best in life and people. A favourite phrase of his was: "It's not where you come from; it's where you're going that matters."

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