



Pope's Grotto

PRESERVATION TRUST

Patrons: Monty Don and Kim Wilkie

Newsletter number 1, March 2016

Some words from our Chairman

David Cornwell, Chairman of the
Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust, writes

Welcome to the first edition of our newsletter under our excellent new logo, courtesy of Paul Izard of Walker Izard on Eel Pie Island. We aim to keep you up to date with progress around the long desired improvement programme for the Grotto as we approach the 300th anniversary of the first cutting of the tunnel under Cross Deep. A great deal has been achieved over the last twelve months as Angela Kidner's review on page 3 clearly demonstrates; now we have to ensure that the matching funding to enable the project to proceed is comfortably in place.

I am very pleased to report that our upcoming symposium is going to receive national coverage and that with the current anniversary celebrations for Capability Brown, all matters gardening are receiving even more attention than usual. In that connection, we are so proud to announce that one of television's most famous practitioners Monty Don has agreed to join Kim Wilkie as a patron of the Trust. Mr Don recently presented the BBC's "The Secret History of the British Garden" to great acclaim.

There is no doubt that substantial progress is being made towards fulfilling the dream of a properly presented grotto for future generations to enjoy so I need to ask those of you who have not yet been able to contribute to do so now. We are about half way to our initial target of £50,000 thanks to the efforts of a number of generous donors and to the proceeds from the fundraising banquet at Strawberry Hill House earlier this month. You can find details of the easiest way to donate on our website .

On page 3 you will find a reminder of when the Grotto will be open for visits in June. We look forward to seeing you then....

Thank you again - please give generously!

Those of you who haven't yet discovered the tribute to Pope courtesy of the Borough and Poet in the City may like to be reminded of the installation at Champion's Wharf by the Riverside in the centre of Twickenham and just by St Mary's where he is buried. The seating with its quotations and the reproduction of the urn that Pope designed for a friend make a really fitting tribute to one of Twickenham's most famous sons.

Bamber Gascoigne to introduce our second symposium

Saturday 21 May 2016, 9.30 am - 4.00 pm

Following our very successful symposium in September, we have planned an exciting programme of speakers for the next one, to be held on Alexander Pope's birthday (he was born on the 21 May 1688). Titled "The Proper Study of Mankind is Man"¹, it will explore his work, his friends and his collaborators, and will be held once again at Radnor House School, Cross Deep, Twickenham, site of the grotto.

Introduced by Bamber Gascoigne, the agenda includes talks by leading specialists: Brian Dix, a garden archaeologist, on Pope's gardening connections; Professor Judith Hawley from Royal Holloway, University of London, on the 'Scriblerians'; Professor Valerie Rumbold from the University of Birmingham, on links between Pope's Grotto and his verse; and Professor Paul Richens from the University of Westminster, on our planned virtual reconstruction of the garden and grotto.

There will also be a preview of "Alexander Pope: A Search for Perfection", a dramatic piece, commissioned by the Trust and funded by Arts Council England, written and performed by Giles Abbott, an award-winning storyteller. This is a very exciting development; Giles will be performing the piece in a number of venues in the borough later this year and also at the National Portrait Gallery. Be one of the first to experience it!



Giles Abbott

There will again be opportunities to visit the grotto during the day and our unique selection of books on Pope will be on sale. Tickets are £20 each (£15 for students) and include lunch and refreshments. All proceeds will go towards the restoration of the grotto. Numbers are limited so do book early at Eventbrite:

popesymposium.eventbrite.co.uk

or visit the "News and Events" page on our website.

¹ An Essay on Man: Epistle II.



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Alexander Pope. Poet and gardener and missing link:
In all, let Nature never be forgot.

by Chris Sumner

Mine was probably the last generation to read Alexander Pope at school – certainly, the Augustan poets are not to be found on the national curriculum these days – but we all know him, albeit unconsciously, and quote him to the extent of cliché every day; more so, arguably, than Shakespeare, Milton or the Bible, even if we don't always know, or remember, the full quotation:

A little learning is a dangerous thing; Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring;

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread;

To err is human; to forgive, divine;

Hope springs eternal in the human breast: Man never is, but always to be blest;

Blessed is the man who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed is the ninth beatitude.

“Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind” is not, as I must admit to having supposed, a hippy-dippy title invented for the 2004 film starring Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet, but a line from “Eloisa to Abelard”, the poem Pope enclosed in a letter of 1717 to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for whom he professed an unreciprocated passion and great grief at her leaving the country to accompany her husband to his post as ambassador to the Sublime Porte at Constantinople.

The poem is inspired of course by the mediaeval romance of Abelard and Eloise, and its opening lines are pertinent to our story:

*“In these deep solitudes and awful cells
Where heav'nly-pensive contemplation dwells*

*And ever-musing Melancholy reigns,
What means this tumult in a vestal's veins?
Ye ragged rocks, which holy knees have worn;
Ye grotts and caverns shagg'd with horrid thorn!
Shrines! where their vigils pale-eyed virgins keep,
And pitying saints, whose statues learn to weep!
...”*

What better description is there of Pope's famous grotto at Twickenham? Yet Pope did not settle in Twickenham until 1719 or commence building his tunnel under the road to connect his riverside villa to his inland garden until 1720, three years after penning the above lines.

If the Middle Ages were one source of inspiration for the writer, the greater inspiration was the Greece and Italy of classical times, with a nod to to what we might these days call sustainability and self-sufficiency:

*“Content with little, I can piddle here
On Broccoli and mutton, round the year;
But ancient friends, (though poor, or out of play)
That touch my bell, I cannot turn away.
'Tis true, no Turbots dignify my boards,
But gudgeons, flounders, what my Thames affords;
To Hounslow-heath I point, and Bansted-down,
Thence comes my mutton, and these chicks my own:
From yon old walnut-tree a show'r shall fall;
And grapes, long ling'ring on my only wall,
And figs...”¹*

This year, 2016, sees the tercentenary of the birth of our best-known landscape designer, Lancelot “Capability” Brown, but it should be remembered that Brown followed and developed in the mid-later c.18 an informal and “natural” style of landscape design promoted by earlier garden designers such as Batty Langley, Stephen Switzer, Charles Bridgeman and William Kent, and by owners of estates like Henry Hoare at Stourhead and Charles Hamilton at Painshill.

In “The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620 – 1820” (Dixon Hunt and Willis, 1975) says of Pope (p. 204), “Pope's place in this chronology is determined by his most celebrated public statement of gardening principles in the verse epistle to Lord Burlington; it is preceded, though, by his early essay of 1713 from The Guardian, in which he attacks the fashion for topiary... Pope exercised a doubly strong influence over the course of garden history: by his published pronouncements, and by his private example. His own gardens at Twickenham were justly famous during his lifetime, not least because he alluded to them in his satires and in his private correspondence; he is also known to have advised friends and acquaintances on their



Lady Mary Wortley Montagu

gardening projects...”

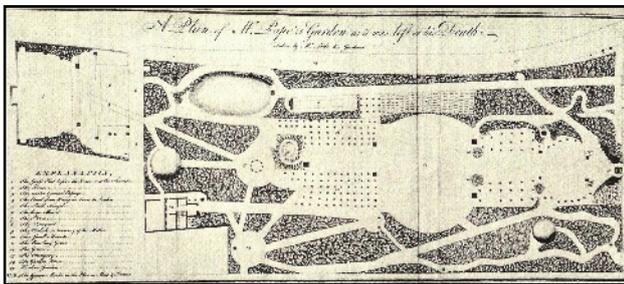
Friends and acquaintances included Lord Burlington at Chiswick, Queen Caroline at Richmond Gardens, Lord Bathurst at Cirencester, Lord Cobham at Stowe, where Pope's bust adorns the Temple of the British Worthies. He was regular visitor to Henrietta Howard at Marble Hill, for the grounds of which Pope prepared sketch designs in the manner of the imaginary reconstructions of the country estates of the Roman poet Pliny. These were published in 1728 in Robert Castell's Villas of the Ancients Illustrated. Castell was part of the Burlington circle, with its programme of promoting the architecture of Ancient Rome as the national style, and the plates in his book show extensive grounds combining strong geometrical elements with semi-formal areas with serpentine paths, and completely irregular “natural” areas.

Continued on page 3

"Alexander Pope. Poet and gardener" continued from page 2

*"To build, to plant, whatever you intend,
To rear the Column, or the Arch to bend,
To swell the Terras, or to sink the Grot;
In all, let Nature never be forgot.
Consult the Genius of the Place in all,
That tells the Waters or to rise, or fall,
Or helps th'ambitious Hill the Heav'ns to scale,
Or scoops in circling Theatres the Vale,
Calls in the Country, catches opening Glades,
Joins willing Woods, and varies Shades from Shades,
Now breaks, or now directs, th'intending Lines;
Paints as you plant, and as you work, Designs
..."*²

Chris Sumner
February 2016



*"A plan of Mr Pope's Garden as it was left on his Death"
John Searle, 1745*

Chris Sumner is a retired architect and an architectural and garden historian who formerly worked for the Greater London Council and for English Heritage. He is a founder member and former Chairman of the London Parks & Gardens Trust and a Director of Strawberry Hill House.

¹ *Alexander Pope: The Second Satire of the Second Book of Horace Imitated, to Mr Bethel, 1734 – quoted in Alexander Pope: The Poet and the Landscape – Mavis Batey. Barn Elms 1999*

² *From An Epistle to Lord Burlington, 1731*

Twickenham Festival Open Days

By kind permission of our partners, Radnor House School, the grotto will be open from 10 am to 3 pm on three Saturdays during the Twickenham Festival - the 11th, 18th and 25th of June. On the latter two days, there will also be performance of Giles Abbott's "A Search for Perfection" (see page 1) in the grotto itself. While waiting to visit the grotto, visitors can use the school's excellent café with a terrace overlooking the river with spectacular views towards Twickenham and Teddington.

Tickets can be booked at Eventbrite:

popesgrotto2016.eventbrite.co.uk

or visit the "News and Events" page on our website. Concessions and family tickets are available.

 Radnor House
celebrating every individual

Project report

Angela Kidner, our fund-raising consultant, reports on progress

The £250,000 project to restore the Grotto, led by the Towners, Radnor House School, and Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust, is under way.

The stones and minerals will be cleaned and restored, a new lighting scheme created evoking candles, reflections and all the dramatic effects of Pope's vision, and a ground-breaking inter-active virtual reconstruction of the Thames, the house and gardens in 1740 will be created. The reconstruction will be accessible to the widest possible audience on the internet. Local people will share in the opportunity to contribute to the research for the reconstruction, and learn how to guide visitors and interpret the Grotto. A partnership with neighbouring Strawberry Hill House will provide visitors with regular tours throughout the Spring and Summer.

The story so far

March 2015: With funding from Historic England, The Pilgrim Trust, the Leche Trust and the H B Allen Charitable Trust the development of the proposals for the conservation of the Grotto begin.

August 2015: Donald Insall Associates' Conservation Management Plan provides a budgeted design and plan for the restoration: the basis for funding bids to Heritage Lottery Fund and Trusts.

September 2015: Alexander Pope's Grotto restoration achieves planning permission and listed building consent.

December 2015: Arts Council England awards funding for a dramatic piece on 'Alexander Pope: A search for perfection', to be written and performed by blind storyteller Giles Abbott. Look out for performances at Orleans House Gallery, Pope's Grotto, the National Portrait Gallery and other venues in 2016 and 2017

February 2016: Historic England awards Stage 2 funding for the conservation of the statuary and carved elements within the Grotto, to be overseen by Odgers Conservation during summer 2016.

Looking ahead

March 2016 onwards: Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust and Radnor House School are undertaking a programme of fundraising events and an appeal, whilst funding bids are being made culminating in a bid to Heritage Lottery Fund in summer 2016.

May 2016: Start of volunteers' research for virtual reconstruction

July 2016: Conservation of statuary and carved elements funded by Historic England

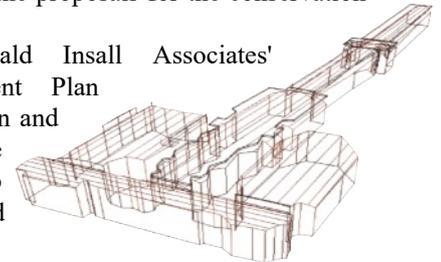
January 2017: Appointment of a Project Manager and Conservation Consultant

March 2017: Appointment of conservation contractors

July 2017: Conservation works start on-site

September 2017: Conservation works complete

September 2017: Virtual reconstruction complete.



A model of the proposed lighting layout by DHA Designs

The Question of Alexander Pope's Skull

A dubious legend laid to rest?

It has been suggested for many years that Alexander Pope's grave was opened and his skull removed during the early part of the 19th century. It is clear that a skull, claimed to be of the man, was displayed and circulated in collections later in the century. Following scholarly appraisal in 1927, it disappeared, probably for all time.

Alexander Pope died on 30 May 1744 and was buried in St Mary's Church, Twickenham on 6 June. His mother had died on 7 June 1733, probably just before her ninety-first birthday, and she was probably buried inside the church. If so, it is likely that Pope was buried next to her later, both of them possibly in a preexisting vault. On 20 January 1927 Sir Arthur Keith (1856-1955), professor and conservator of the Hunterian Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons wrote to Dr J R Leeson, Mayor of Twickenham. Keith sought information concerning the possible removal of Pope's skull from the church, in 1818, by the phrenologist Johann Gaspar Spurzheim. He had apparently been shown a skull by "a man in a very good position" who stated that it was Pope's skull. However, he said that the skull was "intensely feminine", that he had compared it with Rysbrack's head of Pope in the Athenaeum, that it "probably came from Twickenham" and might have been the skull of Pope's mother. As suggested below, this was an actual skull, not a plaster cast.

The grave opened in 1818?

Cobbett's "Memorials of Twickenham", published in 1872 by R S Cobbett, records that "By some writers it is denied that Pope's whole body is in its coffin: they declare that the head was abstracted during some repairs of the church." Cobbett goes on to say that the vicar at the time, Rev Charles Proby, denied this account and said that:

"Upon opening a vault some years ago in the middle aisle of the church, adjoining Pope's, the latter fell in, the coffin was broken, and disclosed the skeleton, which was very short, with a large skull. ... A cast of the skull was taken, with my permission, by the mason employed. I am quite sure that Mr Fletcher, rightly carried out my instructions. No such abstraction could have been made."

The opening of the floor probably took place in February or March 1818, for an unstated purpose, and Proby's statement made between 1856 and 1859. With the passage of 40 years Proby's memory may have been faulty.

An Event in 1826

Eight years later, one Richard Burnett, a distiller, was buried beneath the floor of the nave, adjacent to Pope. The event was described in a letter to *The Gentleman's Magazine* for 10 July 1826:

"on opening a new vault for the remains of Mr Burnett, the distiller, a coffin in a very decayed state was discovered, which, from its being some inches higher than those usually made. ... A very old inhabitant declared it to be the coffin of 'Pope', who died in the year 1744. What renders the assertion more probable are the circumstances of the roof of the coffin being strewed with ashes (a ceremony customary with Roman Catholics)"

This description suggests that the coffin, though of unusual shape, had not been moved or opened before; its ashes

remaining strewn over the top. Nor was there any suggestion that it was opened on this occasion.

Later Correspondence

Sir Arthur Keith wrote to Leeson again in 1927. On 26 January he gave his firm opinion that the skull he had seen was not that of Pope, but, possibly his mother's. In 1957, the matter came to the attention of A J E Cave, then professor of anatomy at St Bartholomew's Hospital. Cave reported that:

"It is certain however that a human skull, alleged to be that of Alexander Pope, was in successive phrenological collections during the last century. He also remarked that this skull 'has very decisively marked female character.'"

The alleged Pope skull was apparently added to the Museum's collections of human osteology, with this attribution:

'Skull bearing the history of being that of Pope the poet. It came into the possession of the donor from the collection Spurzheim the phrenologist. The history alleges that it was obtained from Twickenham Church on an occasion when the poet's tomb was opened.'

Summary

The early records are incomplete and will probably remain so. At the advanced age of 88 Canon Proby, may have conflated two openings of the nave floor. Either in 1818 or in 1826 a skull was removed from either the coffin of Alexander Pope, or his mother. These coffins may have shared an open-topped brick built vault. However, not all burials below the nave of the church (198 recorded in the 17th century alone) may have been in "vaults", probably unroofed, their size and position today unrecorded. Adventitious references on memorials and in the church archives mention 25 vaults beneath the church floor. There are probably a greater number.

Given the work involved, the suggestion that a cast was made overnight, is questionable: there are no known references to a plaster cast of Pope's skull. Featuring in phrenological collections during the 19th century, a skull was, in 1927, donated to the Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons. Following examination it was held to be the skull of a female. However, it was never accessioned on account of its dubious history and, in 1946, could not be found having been, apparently, disposed of. It is likely to have been the skull of Pope's mother, or even another female burial in or near their vault. Disposal may have been the act of Sir Arthur Keith, a man whose reputation has suffered from the exposure of the Piltdown Man skull as a fake. His powerful support for its authenticity is well recorded.

It is to be hoped that the body of Alexander Pope will remain at rest undisturbed, protected for all time from any further archaeological curiosity or intervention, whatever the nature of future work in St Mary's Church, Twickenham.



The ledgerstone in St Mary's Church, beneath which Pope's body lies

This is an abridged version of a longer article by Tony Beckles Willson. The complete article can be found on the Twickenham Museum's website on the page for Alexander Pope.