



# Pope's Grotto

## PRESERVATION TRUST

Patrons: Monty Don and Kim Wilkie

### Newsletter number 2, September 2016

#### Some words from our Chairman

**O**ur second newsletter begins with the news of the death of Tony Beckles Willson whose vision was responsible for the creation of the Trust and for the ambition to preserve and restore the grotto. Robert Youngs has written the adjoining piece which sets out the story of Tony's involvement and I simply need to underline the scale of the loss which we are feeling at the moment and the sadness that Tony will not be able to see the culmination of his work.

Angela Kidner describes the current state of our progress and it has been greatly encouraging to see the restoration of the gates to the grotto and the repairs to the statues (page 2). The main chambers of the Grotto remain to be conserved and we are beginning detailed research and planning to allow this to be completed in the most professional and cost-effective way.

I am pleased to announce the appointment of two new Trustees. Judith Hawley, Professor of Eighteenth Century Literature at Royal Holloway will bring an important academic dimension to our discussions; she has already contributed to our recent symposium. Local resident Geoff Pope, a former member of the London Assembly and Mayor of Richmond-upon-Thames, will bring his local knowledge and interest in his namesake to the table.

Once again, my main message has to be about the need to sustain our fund-raising effort. Any donations at this time in memory of Tony from those of you who remember him would be particularly appreciated and so recorded. We have a scheme in place that enables the sponsorship of the restoration and cleaning of particular minerals and other features in the grotto; please let us know if you would like to join in with it and we will let you have the details. Otherwise I would encourage you to use our website to make donations when we can reclaim gift aid readily.

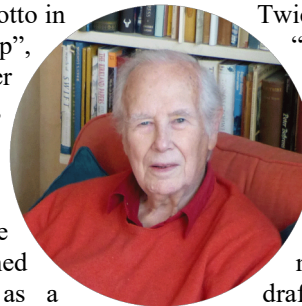
I hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter. Thank you for your continued interest and support.

David Cornwell, Chairman, Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust

#### Anthony Beckles Willson, B.Arch, MCD, ARIBA, FSA 1928-2016

**T**ony Beckles Willson pursued a successful career as an architect, but, having retired in 1984, he developed an interest in Alexander Pope. Over the next several years, having readily mastered computer technology and the internet, he researched Pope's life, his friends, his literary works, his grotto and his villa.

His research resulted, *inter alia*, in his four published books on Pope: "Alexander Pope's Grotto in Twickenham", "Mr Pope & Others at Cross Deep", "Mastiffs & Minerals in Pope" and "Alexander Pope's Twickenham, 1719-44". All these books describe aspects of the Bard of Twickenham's life and achievements from a local perspective - in this respect they are complementary to the corpus of most published material on Pope. He employed his skill as a draftsman, acquired as a practising architect, to illustrate the books with maps and plans. Together with his meticulous research and a sharp eye for design and layout, they are almost entirely the work of one man and are widely appreciated by scholars and the general public worldwide.



His other publications include the definitive history of the Strawberry Hill area, a history of Sion Row, Twickenham, the guide book to St Mary's Church and a catalogue of the monuments therein.

In 1996, Tony became concerned that Pope's Grotto, after 250 years of neglect, should be conserved and made available to the public. He persuaded the owners, St James Independent School, to open it to the public for one day. The response was overwhelming - at one point an estimated 600 people were queuing to get in. As a result, the Grotto was opened in June each year; donations were accepted; books were sold; money was raised; a conservation plan was commissioned and a Trust was established to manage a conservation project. In all these enterprises, Tony was enthusiastic and encouraging. Today, the Trust continues to follow the path laid out by Tony 20 years ago.

Tony was instrumental in bringing a local history museum to Twickenham. The museum, which finally opened in 2001, was the result of the hard work and persistence of Tony and other local people. Once again, he deployed his architectural skills, this time to convert a domestic house into a space appropriate for a museum. Tony saw the need to make our rich local history available to a wider public. Thus was the Museum's popular and award-winning website born, with its hundreds of articles on local people, places, events - many of which were researched and written by Tony.

It is undoubtedly true that it is because of Tony's scholarship, enthusiasm and persistence that we are on the threshold of the first conservation of the only physical manifestation of early 18th century England's most important literary figure. He will be greatly missed by all those who worked with him.

## Project Report

*There's been a period of intense activity since our last newsletter. Angela Kidner reports.*

### Conservation

**C**onservation of the statuary and carved elements in the grotto took place in July. Funded by Historic England, conservators Humphries and Jones cleaned and restored the statues of the Virgin and St James, and the many embedded plaster and marble carvings of animals and other figures, for which some of our supporters have pledged donations. The project was supervised by Odgers Conservation, and the discoveries made in the course of the work have changed our approach to the conservation of the grotto itself.

We now plan to undertake the conservation of one of the chambers to a high level, to demonstrate our aims for the whole project, and in so doing to resolve questions about the appropriate methods for securing and cleaning the many different minerals, treatment of the floor and lighting. The research will be carried out during 2016, with the conservation work starting in the summer of 2017, subject to funding.

At the same time, the 18<sup>th</sup> century gates were removed by Newton Forge, for conservation at their Dorset works, and reinstated in late August. The many layers of paint were analysed and it was discovered that the original colour was a very dark green - in common with other contemporary sites - and not the white that had been applied subsequently. Following confirmation by Historic England, a modern equivalent will be applied. This project is funded by Heritage of London Trust and the Ironmongers' Company.

### Virtual Reconstruction

Our volunteer-led research project is now underway. The objective of the research is to provide the authentic detail needed for the digital reconstruction of Twickenham, the river, Pope's Villa and his garden at about 1740.

Led by Professor Paul Richens of Westminster University and Professor Marion Harney of Bath University, 12 local volunteers are researching contemporary images of boats, wharves, buildings, horses, carriages, trees, flora and fauna, gardens, statuary, costumes - the whole panoply of Georgian life. The iconic view of the Middlesex bank of the Thames between Twickenham and Radnor Gardens by Peter Tillemans (<http://tinyurl.com/Tillemans>) will be the basis for the reconstruction of the houses on the river.

### Visitors to the grotto

In addition to the several hundred visitors during Twickenham Week, the Trust has been welcoming individual visitors to the grotto: Mr and Mrs Fitzwaters (USA, patrons of the

Strawberry Hill House Trust), Philip Jenkins (Clare Hall, University of Cambridge) and Joseph and Ida Rosenblum (University of North Carolina, Greensboro).

A visit by Mary Wellesley, Inigo Thomas, and Katherine Rundell from the prestigious London Review of Books inspired Mary to write this article:

<http://tinyurl.com/LRBWellesley>

This month, John Henry and Chris Duffin of the Geological Society of London's History of Geology Group visited. Their scrutiny of the minerals provided some very valuable insights and the possibility of some collaborative work which will add immeasurably to the conservation process. We hope to have a visit by members of the Society later in the Autumn.

### Fundraising

We will be meeting with the Heritage Lottery Funding October to discuss our proposed two-stage approach to the conservation, which has the support of Historic England.

The project raises exceptional and unusual challenges, which have made grants from conventional funders difficult to find:

- The location of the grotto beneath the school, limiting public access to weekends and school holidays
- The 20th century arts block has resulted in the loss of the context of the grotto with its river frontage
- The integrity of the grotto to the school means that a lease cannot be provided to the Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust

The Trust and School are addressing these challenges in several ways:

- By creating activities to bring Alexander Pope alive taking place in other sites locally and in London (see 'A Search for Perfection' on page 3)
- By developing the virtual reconstruction, which will not only show how Twickenham and Pope's Villa looked in 1740, but will recreate his lost gardens and the natural landscape he devised. As well as enhancing the visitor experience at the grotto, this will be available through the Internet to a world-wide audience
- By working with the school to keep our costs to a minimum, devoting volunteer time to all aspects of the project, maximising the funds available to the conservation project

None of this would be possible without the open and welcoming attitude of Radnor House School, its head Rosie Gill and her staff.

The Trust is enormously grateful for the donations made by followers of the project, and welcomes donations of any size, as well as offers of volunteering help.



*Cleaning the Virgin Mary*



*Cutting through the gate attachments*



*The gates restored, but not yet re-painted*



## 'The proper study of Mankind is Man'

Our second symposium was held on Alexander Pope's 328<sup>th</sup> birthday

**F**ollowing our first very successful symposium last September, the Trust organised a second to coincide with Alexander Pope's 328<sup>th</sup> birthday, 21st May 2016. The title, from Pope's 'An Essay on Man', aptly reflected the theme: Pope's wider interests, not only his grotto and garden.

An interesting and amusing introduction from Bamber Gascoigne provided a stimulating start to the symposium, and participants were encouraged to visit the grotto during the lunch break.

Speakers covered Pope's gardening connections (Brian Dix); the Scriblerians: a group including Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, St. John and Parnell (described by Professor Judith Hawley); and Pope's poetry (Professor Valerie Rumbold).

Giles Abbott, the award-winning storyteller, previewed his performance piece 'Alexander Pope: Search for Perfection' (see article to the right).

Professor Paul Richens gave a glimpse of the planned digital reconstruction of the grotto and garden. The reconstruction will be based on detailed research carried out by local volunteers. The reconstruction will allow users to experience a visit from river through the Grotto to garden. Here is a extract from Professor Richens' plan:

*'You find yourself in a boat mid-river, around Twickenham, where you are being sculled by a Thames waterman in a typical 18th century wherry. It is a fine mellow early summer afternoon in 1740. You can't steer the boat, but you can look around to see what's about: the riverside villas with their waterfront gardens, more workaday premises - a tannery, wheelwrights shop - other craft sailing, fishing, or being hauled by hand by a gang of men on the towpath.*

*...  
You arrive at the lawn in front of Pope's villa and are disembarked. The wherry returns without you. You are free to walk around the lawn, admire the villa and the statuary in the garden, and approach the archway to the grotto. When you enter, you will experience a video segment of Pope in his reconstructed grotto, talking to you, or perhaps conversing with one of his mineral-supplying friends, about the grotto, the house and garden, and what they mean to him...'*



Visitors on the terrace

You can read more about this project at:

<http://tinyurl.com/grottoDR>

We were delighted to welcome an audience of more than 70 people, and we received much congratulatory and encouraging feedback from attendees. We look forward to the day when we can show our supporters around the restored grotto and let them experience the digital reconstruction. In the meantime, we continue with fundraising for the restoration and we plan to run more events to interest and educate people about Alexander Pope, his work, his friends and his many interests.

To this end, we are already planning our third symposium, which will be held in partnership with Strawberry Hill House in the first half of 2017.

## 'A Search for Perfection'

**The Trust commissioned this performance piece from award-winning storyteller Giles Abbott. The performances are supported by Arts Council England. His storytelling vividly described the life of Alexander Pope, with his difficulties of illness, deformity and religious exclusion, as well as his genius. The first performance was at our symposium on 21 May.**

In June, Giles performed the piece several times in the right-hand chamber of the Grotto on two of the Grotto Open Days during the Twickenham Festival. Each performance was enthusiastically attended. We wish to thank all the local residents who attended and the many people who were attracted to the event from further afield.

The audiences were captivated by the intimacy and excitement of Giles's piece; here are a few of the appreciative comments:

*"Arts Council England ... Money well spent."*

*"Giles Abbott is absolutely fantastic. Brings it all to life in a magical way...."*

*"...I loved the storytelling. It was great and I felt as if I was there.."*

*"The storytelling was immersive, fun, interesting and thought provoking. An excellent addition to visiting the Grotto"*

*"A brilliant and educational and entertaining performance"*

*"It was the best story ever. I loved it"*

Giles has also performed 'A Search for Perfection' at Twickenham Library and will be at the Old Sorting Office, Barnes, on the 13 October 2016. Future performances will be at the National Portrait Gallery on 18 May 2017, the Twickenham Festival in June 2017 and Strawberry Hill House. Booking information can be found on Giles Abbot's website:

<http://gilesabbott.com/current-projects/alexander-pope/>



Bamber Gascoigne introduces the symposium



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## Alexander Pope and the Grotto at Crux Easton

Contemporary evidence, anecdotal references and 19th century gazetteers record a grotto at Crux Easton allegedly built by nine maiden sisters on the Lisle estate before 1733, visited and commemorated in verse by Alexander Pope.

**C**ruX-Easton is a small settlement near Highclere on the borders of Hampshire and Berkshire, about 7 miles south of Newbury. Here the Lisles owned the manor from about 1300 until 1762. Edward Lisle (1666-1722) came to the Crux Easton estate in about 1693 from Moyles Court near Ringwood. He married Mary Phillipps (1672-1749), daughter of Sir Ambrose Phillipps, of Garrenden, Leicester in 1688 and fathered 8 sons and 12 daughters over a period of 28 years.

Of Edward's first three daughters, only Elizabeth lived to marry. She died in 1726 without issue and was buried at the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Leyton. Nine further daughters were born between 1699 and 1717.

### A Grotto constructed

Remarkably, these nine "maiden ladies" built a grotto, though exactly when, or why, is not clear, although it was probably before August 1733 when Alexander Pope may have visited and composed some lines about these ladies and their creation, and certainly before the nine became eight on the marriage of Jane on 24 August 1734. First recorded in 1748 in manuscript in a volume of papers belonging to Lord Orrery, Pope's lines are described as an "Inscription on a GROTTTO of Shells at CRUX-EASTON the Work of Nine young Ladies":

*"Here shunning idleness at once and praise,  
This radiant pile nine rural sisters raise;  
The glitt'ring emblem of each spotless dame,  
Clear as her soul, and shining as her fame;  
Beauty which Nature only can impart,  
And such a polish as disgraces Art;  
But Fate dispos'd them in this humble sort,  
And hid in desarts what wou'd charm a court."*

Did these young ladies, their ages spanning 18 years actually raise the radiant pile themselves? By 1733 the youngest was 15 or 16, the eldest perhaps 34. One can certainly see them applying decorations of shells and suchlike but not, perhaps actually constructing the flint walls or the roof. It is possible that they actually made use of an existing building.

According to one report the interior contained niches in the walls in which each of the Lisle daughters would stand, with a central plinth to accommodate Pope or his muse (Apollo). Another report suggests that there were seats round the walls with a niche to be occupied by "the presiding magician", presumably also Pope or, in his absence, a substitute. There is no contemporary written record to confirm any of this but it does suggest a certain whimsical indulgence in ceremony.

### Pope at Highclere Castle and Crux Easton?

There is no known reference to Crux Easton or the Lisle family in Pope's surviving correspondence and, to that extent, no support for the statement in the Victoria County History that Pope was a frequent visitor.

However, it seems likely that Pope knew the family already and had visited from Highclere Castle in previous years. Here lived the Honourable Robert Herbert, second son of the 8th Earl of Pembroke, whose elder brother Lord Henry

became the 9th Earl in 1732/3. There are works by Pope in the Castle library: among others his first printing of 1717 and the six volumes of his edition of Shakespeare's Works published 1723-1725.

On his way home from Smyrna (present day Izmir)), in August 1734, Thomas Lisle wrote, in verse, to his sisters, from Cairo, indicating that the two households were on friendly terms, the young Herbert perhaps casting his eye over the ladies:

*"Here I liv'd like a king, never hoarded my pelf,  
Kept a coach for my sisters, a nag for myself,  
With something that's good, when our Highclear friends  
come,  
And, spite of 'squire Herbert, a fire in each room."*

There are other hints at social intercourse between the families. Harriet, the youngest Lisle daughter made crayon portraits of Sir Richard and Lady Kingsmill, living at the Castle at the end of the 16th century. They were a branch of the same family long established at Sydmonton Court. Copies are today at the Castle, the originals thought to be at Sydmonton. Thomas was a good friend of the Hon Robert Herbert, becoming a trustee of his probate settlement of 1758. As Lord of the Manor and owner of the advowson it is likely that Herbert presented Thomas to the Living at Burghclere, in 1735.

### The grotto recorded

Joseph Warton (1722-1800) is credited by Robert Carruthers for information about the Grotto. He noted that "Warton says this grotto was adorned with shell-work and was constructed by the Misses Lisle, sisters of Dr (Thomas) Lisle, Chaplain to the Factory at Smyrna, a long established trading post of the Levant Company. There had been a church built there from 1625 for the use of the staff at the factory. Lisle (1709-65) returned to England in 1735, presently becoming rector of the parish of Burghclere nearby."

As churchmen they were probably known to each other. Warton surely knew the grotto; he spent most of his life in Hampshire. Born at Basingstoke and schooled there before going on to Winchester College, returning via Oxford as a curate he obtained curacies at Droxford and Chawton in the Meon Valley. He obtained the Living of Winslade in 1748 and was appointed Rector of Tunworth in 1754, both just south of Basingstoke.

In 1766 he was appointed Headmaster of Winchester College after a period as Deputy. There, he would be joined by his brother Thomas for summer recreation. Thomas would explore the area, interested in its landscape and various other attractions.

In 1782 Joseph obtained the Living of Wickham, north of Fareham, retiring here in 1793, prior to which he had enjoyed briefly the tenure of Easton, near Newbury and only a few miles from Crux Easton.

Warton was himself a poet of indifferent achievement, and cast in a different mould from Pope. His publication, "An

Continued on page 5



## Some other very local grottos

*Hundreds of people visit Pope's Grotto each year, but few of them are aware of two other grottos, each a few hundred metres away.*

### Stanhope's Cave

Sir William Stanhope bought Pope's Villa in 1745, the year after the poet's death, though he did not occupy the property until 1748. In 1761 he bought the property which lay diagonally across Radnor Road (then 'Back Lane' or 'Worple Way') at the top of Pope's garden. It is now known as Radnor Lodge. There had been a house on this land, occupied in the winter of 1747/8 by the writer Henry Fielding, who wrote 'Tom Jones'.

Stanhope then constructed a "cave" in the corner of the garden leading to a tunnel beneath the lane, giving him private access from his garden. The cave, not strictly a grotto, was a minor pantheon in Stanhope's honour containing, according to a visitor in 1789, "three beautiful busts of Sir W Stanhope, his daughter and Lord Chesterfield, cut in Italian marble; opposite each a Roman urn of exquisite workmanship placed in a niche formed in the wall; around are scattered huge masses of stone in imitation of rocks". Somewhere, too, space had been found for a marble bust of Pope himself. At some point a wall was inserted to separate the structure in Pope's garden from the tunnel. The Cave was moved to its present position when Radnor Road was widened in the 1930s.

Today, the remains of the Cave can be seen at the top of Pope's garden, now land belonging to our partners, Radnor House School. A stone above the entrance carries the barely-legible inscription:

*"The Humble Roof, the Garden's Scanty Line*

*Ill spoke the Genius of the Bard  
Divine:*



*Sunrise or peacock? You decide*

*But Fancy now Displays a Fairer Scope*

*And STANHOPE'S Plans Unfold the Soul of Pope"*

The tunnel emerges in the garden of Radnor Lodge from where it's possible to see the niches and the decorated walls - three 'mosaics' made of lighter and darker rocks: two peacocks (or possibly sunrises) and a butterfly, each about one metre high. The tunnel is in private ownership and not accessible to the public.

### Thames Eyot Shell Grotto and Loggia

On busy Cross Deep, about 300 metres from Radnor House School towards the centre of Twickenham, a large block of flats, Thames Eyot, conceals a grotto and a loggia in its grounds. These little-known gems (unknown, apparently, to many residents of the flats) are both in a sorry state and in need of urgent care and attention.

The shell grotto was probably constructed by the Poulett family in the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Immediately in front of the grotto, the later, loggia, a handsome structure with Tuscan columns topped by a frieze with triglyphs, is constructed of Portland stone and overlooks the Thames and Eel Pie Island. Neither structure can be visited at the present, but concerned residents of the flats are determined that these Grade 2 listed buildings should not be allowed to deteriorate further.

You can find out more about these structures and the plans for saving them at:

<http://tinyurl.com/EyotGrotto>



*The Loggia in Thames Eyot*

### Crux Easton, continued from page 4

Essay on the Writings & Genius of Pope" was published in 1756, with a second volume in 1784. It was critical, so offending Owen Ruffhead, Pope's first serious biographer. However, he produced his own edition of Pope's works in 1797, reprinted in 1822, the source of Carruthers' information about the Crux Easton grotto.

### Conclusion

Allowing for some conjecture, this is a summary of what may have happened:

Pope came into social contact with the Lisle family when visiting the Herberts at Highclere. Surprisingly, perhaps, he left no record of this that has been identified.

His unrecorded visits may have been "stopovers" when on the way to other houses or places such as Bath and Cirencester. Early visits to Hampshire may even have been undertaken with his father, when the family were living at Binfield. Following publicity for his grotto the Lisle daughters were

inspired to make their own, partly as a tribute to him. Inevitably flattered, he wrote some verses about their creation. It is likely that these were set down, extempore, on separate visits. One at least was intended to be an inscription and was dated to 23 August 1733. The other was probably written earlier.

The estate was sold out of the family in 1762 and the grotto fell into disrepair, its shell decorations removed and reputedly disposed round the lake in the grounds of Highclere Castle. Its site is marked on the Ordnance survey of 1910, on the southern edge of Grotto Copse, the building having disappeared by then. One would like to know why this site was chosen, so far from the main house...

*This is a much abbreviated version of an article by Tony Beckles Willson, written in 2009. The complete article, including sources and references, can be found on the Twickenham Museum's website in the page about Pope's Grotto.*