



# Pope's Grotto

## PRESERVATION TRUST

Patrons: Monty Don and Kim Wilkie

*Newsletter number 4, November 2017*

### *Conservation of the South Chamber Completed*

*After years of neglect, Pope's Grotto is finally being professionally conserved*

**A**t last, 273 years after Alexander Pope's death, the first conservation of a part of his grotto has been completed. During Radnor House School's summer holidays, a pilot project on the South Chamber was carried out by Taylor Pearce Restoration Services, with technical supervision by Odgers Conservation. The minerals, already recorded and identified, were cleaned and where necessary re-set in new lime mortar, revealing their subtle colours and textures. The recent cement floor finish was removed, revealing an intriguing soft red brick floor, possibly of earlier date than the grotto, laid diagonally. We have sought

**the advice of Thames Valley Archaeological Services to identify its age and composition.**

DHA Designs and SI Electrical designed and installed a flexible and removable lighting system, which creates an ambient illumination that does not hinder the use of torches for the close examination that our visitors have enjoyed, and a modern LED version of candle sconces, evoking the form of lighting that Pope would have employed.

This work was enabled by the Resilient Heritage funding we received from Heritage Lottery Fund, and by grants from HB Allen Charitable Trust, The Pilgrim Trust and Leche Trust to all of whom we are very grateful.

*Continued on page 2*



*The South Chamber, conserved and lit*

... continued from page 1



Conservator Albert Traby working on the roof of the South Chamber

A further benefit of our HLF grant is help for the Trust with the writing of a fundraising strategy and an audience development plan. We were pleased to appoint the experienced mother-son team of Jane and Tom Newman, and work is ongoing to achieve both plans before the end of October. Their participation in the recent London Open House day produced valuable data for the next stage of the project.

In the course of re-fixing the minerals in the chamber, it became clear that there were gaps both there and in the rest of the grotto, amounting to some 10 sq metres, that would require infilling with new material (see right).



Danielle Milbank of Thames Valley Archaeological Services surveying the brick floor

## Conservation of the South Chamber: next steps

**W**ith the knowledge gained from the pilot project, we now have an informed idea of the costs of the conservation and lighting of the remainder of the grotto, and we will apply to Heritage Lottery Fund before the end of the year for an 'Our Heritage' grant. The budget is in the region of £300,000 so we will also be applying to charitable trusts and to our supporters to help us reach this target.

We hope very much to succeed in time to be able to carry out the work in summer 2018, but if this proves to be too ambitious we will be sure to achieve it in 2019, the 300th anniversary of Alexander Pope's arrival in Twickenham.

## Preparing for Stage 2

**T**hanks to the interest and support brought to the project by John Henry and Chris Duffin of the Geological Society of London, History of Geology Group, we have received a thorough report by Professor Roy Starkey on the type and provenance of many of the minerals in the Grotto.

Professor Starkey offered to locate and supply some replacements to fill the gaps, and we have gratefully received 12 boxes of selected stones, fully identified and with their provenance documented. Some 85 kg of minerals and rocks are now acclimatizing in the North Chamber, ready for Stage 2. We are very grateful to Frank Ince, Chris Jewson, Frank Bouweraerts and Tony Rigby for supplying them.

Pope was delighted to receive gifts of minerals for his grotto from around the country, most famously from Dr William Borlase in Cornwall. We are equally delighted to be following his example!



Minerals acclimatizing in the North Chamber

## Pope's 'mortal blow'

*"A citizen is no sooner proprietor of a couple of yews, but he entertains thoughts of erecting them into giants"*

**P**ope and his circle are often credited as instigators of the English landscape movement. In practice, the matter was not as simple as that - changes in garden design come slowly and the transition from the formal French and Dutch models took place over at least 30, perhaps 50, years. More fundamentally, garden design had largely evolved in an almost continuous way until this point, with elements of previous fashions incorporated in the new, but a landscape garden can in no way be considered an evolution of a French- or Dutch-style formal garden. Discontinuities such as this are not bridged without vision and motivation - either a carrot or a stick. Pope, with his classical education and advanced ideas on garden design, certainly created a vision.



*Het Loo, Apeldoorn, Netherlands. A typical 17<sup>th</sup> c. Dutch garden and 'greens' are everywhere*

Motivation came from numerous sources, but a singular turning point may have arrived when Pope published an article in Richard Steele's short-lived 'Guardian' magazine in 1713. In it he deploys his considerable critical skills as a stick and excoriates the formal style in a way that would have caused any gentleman contemplating the creation of a formal garden at that time to sit back and reconsider his plans. As Anne Scott-James wrote in *The Pleasure Garden*, "from the moment Pope put quill to paper, the formal garden received a mortal blow."

There follows part of Pope's 1713 article. In the first section (not reproduced here), he discusses his vision of a landscape garden based on simplicity and classical elements. He then delivers his 'mortal blow', shown below. Note that "greens" refers to

clipped box or yew and other forms of topiary (not cabbage and kale) of which Pope seems to have had a particular dislike.

### *Alexander Pope's article in Guardian 173, September 1713*

**H**ow contrary to this simplicity is the modern practice of gardening! We seem to make it our study to recede from nature, not only in the various tonsure of greens into the most regular and formal shapes, but even in monstrous attempts beyond the reach of the art itself. We run into sculpture, and are yet better pleased to have our trees in the most awkward figures of men and animals, than in the most regular of their own.

*"Here interwoven branches form a wall,  
And from the living fence green turrets rise;  
There ships of myrtle sail in seas of box;  
A green encampment yonder meets the eye,  
And loaded citrons bearing shields and spears."<sup>1</sup>*

I believe it is no wrong observation, that persons of genius, and those who are most capable of art, are always most fond of nature: as such are chiefly sensible, that all art consists in the imitation and study of nature. On the contrary, people of the common level of understanding are principally delighted with the little niceties and fantastical operations of art, and constantly think that finest which is least natural. A citizen is no sooner proprietor of a couple of yews, but he entertains thoughts of erecting them into giants, like those of Guildhall. I know an eminent cook, who beautified his country seat with a coronation dinner in greens; where you see the champion flourishing on horseback at one end of the table, and the queen in perpetual youth at the other.

For the benefit of all my loving countrymen of this curious taste, I shall here publish a catalogue of greens to be disposed of by an eminent town gardener, who has lately applied to me upon this head. He represents, that for the advancement of a politer sort of ornament in the villas and gardens adjacent to this great city, and in order to distinguish

<sup>1</sup> *The Garden of Alcinoüs, From Homer's Odyssey vii.*

... continued from page 3

those places from the mere barbarous countries of gross nature, the world stands much in need of a virtuoso gardener who has a turn to sculpture, and is thereby capable of improving upon the ancients of his profession in the imagery of evergreens. My correspondent is arrived to such perfection, that he cuts family pieces of men, women, or children. Any ladies that please may have their own effigies in myrtle, or their husbands' in hornbeam. He is a puritan wag, and never fails when he shows his garden, to repeat that passage in the Psalms, 'Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine, and thy children as olive branches round thy table.' I shall proceed to his catalogue, as he sent it for my recommendation.

'Adam and Eve in yew; Adam a little shattered by the fall of the tree of knowledge in the great storm: Eve and the serpent very flourishing.

'The tower of Babel, not yet finished.

'St. George in box; his arm scarce long enough, but will be in a condition to stick the dragon by next April.

'A green dragon of the same, with a tail of ground-ivy for the present.

'N. B. These two not to be sold separately.

'Edward the Black Prince in cypress.

'A laurestine bear in blossom, with a juniper hunter in berries.

'A pair of giants, stunted, to be sold cheap.

'A queen Elizabeth in phyllyrea, a little inclining to the green-sickness, but of full growth.

**O**ur indefatigable supporters and regular attendees at our symposia, Gerald and Margaret Hull, in between travelling the country and giving talks on shell houses and grottoes, have recently published a book on the work of Joseph Lane and his son Josiah, titled "Half-forgotten".

The Lanes were 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century grotto builders and were involved in the building of grottoes at, *inter alia*, Stourhead, Painshill, Oatlands Park, Fonthill and Old Wardour Castle. This 97 page book is a survey of their work and contains 42 images. It costs £10. You can find out more about it and order a copy through their website:

[www.shellhouse-talks.com](http://www.shellhouse-talks.com)



## Half-Forgotten

The Grotto work of Joseph Lane (1717-1784) and his son Josiah (1753-1833) of Tisbury, Wiltshire.

A Re-Appraisal.

by Margaret and Gerald Hull

'Another queen Elizabeth in myrtle, which was very forward, but miscarried by being too near a savine.

'An old maid of honour in wormwood.

'A topping Ben Jonson in laurel.

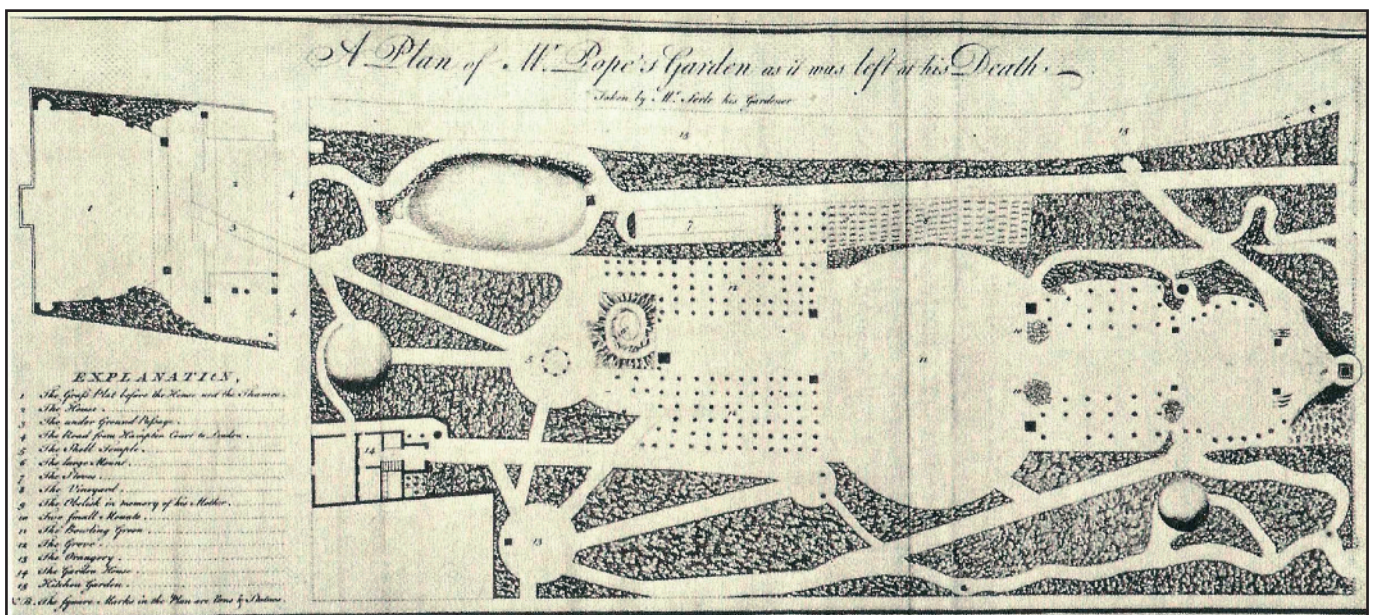
'Divers eminent modern poets in bays, somewhat blighted, to be disposed of, a pennyworth.

'A quickset hog, shot up into a porcupine, by its being forgot a week in rainy weather.

'A lavender pig, with sage growing in his belly.

'Noah's ark in holly, standing on the mount; the ribs a little damaged for want of water.'

'A pair of maidenheads in fir, in great forwardness.'



'A Plan of Mr. Pope's Garden as it was left at his death', John Serle, 1745