



Pope's Grotto

PRESERVATION TRUST

Patrons: Monty Don OBE, Sir Donald Insall CBE, Kim Wilkie

Newsletter number 5, August 2018

Project news: Fundraising, fundraising and more fundraising!

Our Heritage Consultant, Angela Kidner, writes

The Trust held a Private View of the restored South Chamber on 30 November 2017, concluding an exciting phase of work. The cleaned and re-set minerals, the new lighting and the newly-revealed brick floor met with enthusiasm from the guests. We were thrilled that so many of the conservation team and geology advisers were there to explain their work and to be thanked by David Cornwell (Chair of the Trustees) and David Paton (Executive Principal, Radnor House School).



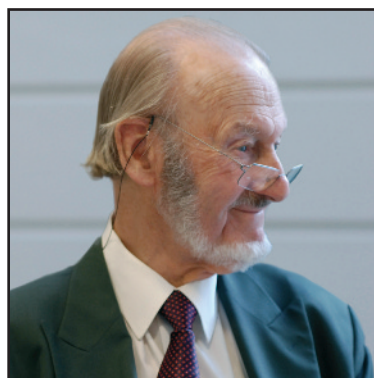
David Odgers, our conservation consultant, talks about the conservation of the South Chamber

2018 has already been a busy year, with trustees and volunteers running monthly public openings of the grotto, greatly helped by Radnor House School making its café and sunny terrace available. At the same time much work has been going into building our Heritage Lottery Fund application and activity plan, and writing numerous bids for match funding to charitable trusts. We are indebted to Jane Newman who, having been employed to

write the fundraising strategy, has stayed on to volunteer her help with this phase. Grants from Country Houses Foundation and London Community Foundation have been gratefully received, we are awaiting news of £105,000 worth of bids submitted, and have bids for a further £110,000 in the pipeline in addition to the HLF bid which we plan to submit during the summer.

Because building work can only take place during the school summer holidays, and match funding is essential for a successful HLF bid, we have delayed the conservation programme by a year. So if you were expecting to see the completed grotto this summer, you will be happy to know that it is not too late to contribute to the fund! If we succeed in our aim, the grotto will be conserved in time to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Alexander Pope's arrival in Twickenham.

In June we were delighted to have a visit from our patron Sir Donald Insall with Lady Insall, who gave us not only the benefit of a very careful examination of the work already carried out but many helpful and simple ideas for the presentation and treatment of the



Sir Donald Insall

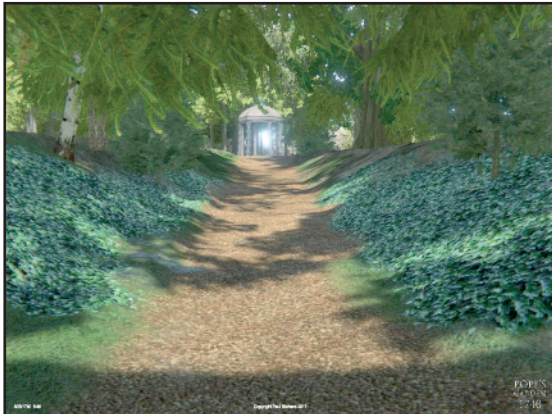
grotto's setting. His suggested introduction of the effects of shimmering water, glowing light and reflections will be fed into the brief for the architects.

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Our digital reconstruction, "A Virtual Arcadia", continues to grow, with the painstaking visual reconstruction of Pope's Villa and 5-acre garden. Professor Paul Richens is now re-creating the many boats in Peter Tillemans' 18th century panorama with the generous help of Rob Shepherd and Mark Edwards, boatbuilder. The archive

research carried out by our volunteers has found a home with a new Lottery-funded project by University of London Institute of Historical Research called 'Layers of London'. The project brings together digitized historic maps, photos and research, providing unique access to all aspects of the history of London of which Twickenham's Arcadia is an important element. We are delighted to be one of its many partners.



Two views from our reconstruction of Pope's garden and villa: the Shell Temple seen from the garden entrance and the front of Pope's Villa on Cross Deep



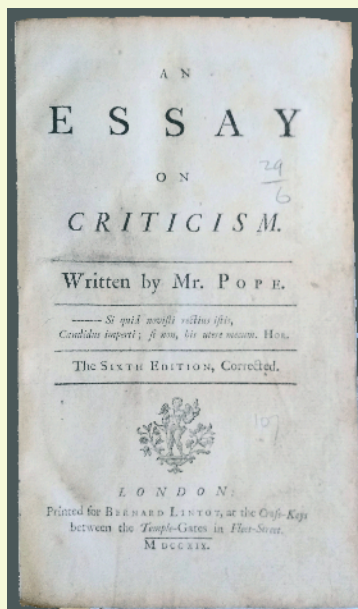
Celebrating the Tercentenary of Pope's arrival in Twickenham

By 1718 Alexander Pope had acquired enough finance from his literary works to search for a respectable property away from the heart of London. So it was that he arrived in Twickenham in the Spring of 1719 and occupied a modest property (which he rebuilt shortly after) on the riverside in Cross Deep, Twickenham along with 5 acres of land in which to form a garden.

Pope wrote to his painter friend, Charles Jervas, at that time:

"The Gods and fate have fix'd me on the border of the Thames in the districts of Richmond and Twickenham"

Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust plans to celebrate the 300th anniversary of his arrival with a series of public events. These may include: a symposium on Pope, the symbolic



Title page from a 1719 edition of "An Essay on Criticism" published by Bernard Lintot (in the possession of the Twickenham Museum)

installation of a bust of Pope in his grotto, guided riverside walks and displays of related 18th century art and literature. Further refurbishment of the grotto itself may also be possible to view.

At the end of that year, on December 31st 1719, he wrote enthusiastically to William Browne:

"The place I am in is as delightful as any you can imagine to be, in this season so very airy, and yet so warm, that you will think yourself in a sort of heaven, where the prospect is boundless, and the sun your near neighbour".

Pope remained in Twickenham to enjoy his "sort of heaven" whilst impressing his artistic friends and acquaintances as he embellished his unique Villa, Gardens and Grotto, until his untimely death 25 years later.

Open Days and Volunteers at Pope's Grotto

Trustee Dawn Culmer has been working hard running our regular Open Days

Since the beginning of this year we have opened the Grotto once a month and, as always in June, we were open for the three Saturdays during the Twickenham Festival.

Numbers were at full capacity and we were delighted to welcome so many enthusiastic and knowledgeable visitors. It was also pleasing to see so many children engage with the Grotto and with the help of our torches they were able to find and identify many of the minerals. In total, there have been more than 700 visitors so far this year.

In May, Professor Judith Hawley accompanied a group from the Johnson Society of London following on from our very successful fundraising evening at Dr. Johnson's House (see page 4).

Feedback is always very positive. Here are some comments made by visitors:

"With the world so serious the celebration of a folly is all the more important".

"It's an incredibly rare surviving example of such a grotto, and Pope is an important cultural figure".

"The grotto offers a fascinating insight into Pope's poetry and wider cultural interest in landscape gardening and ideas of the enlightenment".

"It is important to preserve the grotto as part of Britain's literary heritage. The site will be visited by generations to come".

All our visitors' comments support our objectives of restoring and conserving the



Young visitors explore the South Chamber

Grotto and this is, of course, vital in supporting our fundraising bids.

We were also able to kick-start our volunteer recruitment campaign and were delighted to have Maggie Chang and Harriet Mckinley-Smith, students from Royal Holloway, University of London, join us. We look forward to their continued support in the next academic year. Sister Paula, headmistress at nearby St. Catherine's School, also recruited one of her sixth formers, Iona

Singh, as a volunteer and we are hopeful that more pupils will benefit from involvement in the future.

Our thanks to Radnor House School for their support in making the Open Days possible and to Fran De Vries for running the café.

The Grotto will be open on the morning of Saturday 22nd of September for Open House London and on two Saturdays in October and November.



Books for sale at an Open Day

Dr Johnson and Mr Pope: 'an ornament from an inconvenience'

Our fundraising event in Dr Johnson's House

In March, sixty supporters of the grotto descended on central London for a soirée at Dr Johnson's House, Gough Square. This magnificent museum, the home of another great eighteenth century writer, was a fitting venue for this enjoyable and informative event because Johnson, like Pope, was a sociable writer who liked to gather friends for literary conversations. It was even more fitting as Johnson published a 'Life of Pope' in 1779 which is still much quoted because of its perceptive criticisms of the poet's life and works. Johnson tartly remarked: 'as some men try to be proud of their defects, he extracted an ornament from an inconvenience, and vanity produced a grotto where necessity enforced a passage.'



Photo © Cathy Cooper

Guests enjoyed an opportunity to tour the house while consuming delicious refreshments provided by Nino Harvey Caterers. They were also treated to a preview of Professor Paul Richens' digital reconstruction of the villa and talks by leading authorities on Johnson and Pope. Professor Philip Smallwood, Emeritus Professor of English at Birmingham City University and Visiting Fellow in the School of Humanities, University of Bristol talked illuminatingly about Johnson's engagement with Pope's verse. Dr Emrys Jones, Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture, Kings College London drew out the fascinating connections between these writers' politics and literary and social relations¹.

We were delighted that two of our patrons, Sir Donald Insall and Kim Wilkie, were able to join us and mingle with our guests, many of whom were themselves experts on garden history and literary culture. Our enormous gratitude must be expressed to the Curator of Dr Johnson's House, Celine Luppó McDaid and the Events Manager, Helen Woollison for hosting this highly successful event.

¹ An abbreviated transcript of Dr Jones' talk is on page 6.



Photo © Cathy Cooper

Hodge, Dr Johnson's cat, welcomed guests to the house

A tragedy at Stanton Harcourt

The death of two young lovers inspired Pope to write a well-known epitaph

If you're reading this on the 31st July, then it's the 300th anniversary of a curious event in 1718. On the last day of July, whilst staying at Stanton Harcourt Manor in Oxfordshire, Alexander Pope witnessed a tragic incident. A 25 year old local labourer, John Hewet and his fiancé Sarah Drew, a milkmaid, were both killed when they were struck by lightning in a nearby barley field.

Pope had been working on his translation of the fifth volume of the Iliad at the time of the storm and watched the events from his room in a c.15th tower (now known as Pope's Tower)ⁱ. This is how he described it:

"The clouds grew black, and such a storm of thunder and lightning ensued .. Sarah was frightened, and fell down in a swoon in a heap of barley. John .. never separated from her ... Immediately after was heard so loud a crash as if the heavens had split asunder.

Everyone was now solicitous for his neighbour and they called to one another throughout the field, 'no answer being returned to those who called to the lovers, they stepped to the place where they lay. They perceived the barley all in a smoke, and then spied the faithful pair: John with one arm about Sarah's neck and the other held

over her, as if to screen her from the lightning.

They were struck dead, and stiffened in this tender posture. Sarah's left eye was injured, and there appeared a black spot on her breast. Her lover was blackened all over; not the least sign of life was found in either. Attended by the melancholy companions, they were conveyed to the town, and next day were interred in Stanton Harcourt churchyard".



The couple were buried together and a monument was erected by Lord Harcourt with an inscription by Pope:

*Think not by rigorous judgment seiz'd
A pair so faithful could expire
Victims so pure Heav'n saw well pleas'd
And snatch'd them in coelestial fire
Live well & fear no sudden fate;
When God calls virtue to the grave
Alike 'tis Justice soon or late
Mercy alike to kill or save
Virtue unmov'd can hear the Call
And face the Flash that melts the Ball*

A commemorative service was held to mark the 300th Anniversary at St. Michael's Church on July 29th.



An engraving of Pope's Tower with Stanton Harcourt church by J C Buckler, 1817

ⁱ The proceeds of Pope's translation of the Iliad enabled him to move to Twickenham and build his villa and grotto.

Dr Johnson and Mr Pope: 'An Ornament from an Inconvenience'

A abbreviated transcript of a talk given at our fund-raising event at Dr Johnson's House, London by Dr Emrys Jones, Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture, Kings College London, on 15th March 2018

I'm very grateful for this opportunity to speak about Pope's grotto and about why its preservation is such a worthy cause. Through it one also preserves - more than preserves: restores - Alexander Pope's name and his work. Thinking about Pope in light of his grotto allows us to break him out of the polite prison that his orderly rhyming couplets sometimes seem to fashion for him. It clarifies his status as spokesperson for an era caught between rationalism and superstition, modern artifice and classical simplicity.

I want to talk today about how Pope resembled his grotto, or it resembled him; how both came into being through a series of paradoxes: the eccentric made fashionable, the solitary made public, the inconvenient refined, as Dr Johnson writing later in the eighteenth century would have it, into ornament. And I think that by exploring those paradoxes, we can go some way to explaining not only Pope's significance for his own era, but also the challenges implicit in speaking for him today, the reasons that he can be so ubiquitous in our culture, one of the most quoted figures in literary history, and at the same time little recognised, often perceived as remote from us, and lacking the emotional depth or richness of a Shakespeare, Milton or Wordsworth.

Readers might come across one of his neat, aphoristic phrases and assume him to be a neat, aphoristic kind of

poet, someone with the wit to observe that "a little learning is a dangerous thing", but not the warmth to speak to our hearts as the Romantic poets do or to shape our view of human nature as Shakespeare so often does. I find it ironic that one of the pieces of Pope's poetry most prominently celebrated in twenty-first-century popular culture should be a passage hailing the value of obscurity and oblivion:

*"How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!
Each pray'r accepted, and each wish
resign'd[.]"*

That's taken from 1717's *Eloisa to Abelard*, a relatively early work that I'll be discussing from a few perspectives today. Pope's *Eloisa* finds solace in the idea of anonymity, a blamelessness at odds with the exceptionality of her desire. Is she ultimately willing to surrender her love for the disgraced and castrated preacher Abelard? For all that she speaks of resignation repeatedly throughout Pope's poem, she ends up yearning for the tomb she will come to

share with her tragic lover; she describes the memory of their story persisting into a future time when the tears of pilgrimaging lovers will not only pay them homage but may be tasted - so that the lovers, to quote, "drink the



Dr Emrys Jones speaking at our soirée

falling tears each other sheds”.

I'm sure that Pope, like Eloisa, was in fact less than enthused with the prospect of being “by the world forgot”. The “eternal sunshine” that Pope describes through Eloisa is not his chief bequest to us; nor would it be a desirable or memorable one. His legacy is actually very far from spotless. Despite our own culture's tendency to flatten and reduce a poet to his or her most charming or quotable lines, it is the blemishes, the moments of cruelty or passion, the metrical irregularities or the strange follies - grottoes! - that make Pope live for me. There may be such blemishes even in those apparently smooth and serene lines quoted above. *“Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind, / Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.”* It's beautiful. But I wonder if the virtuous amnesia that Pope and Eloisa describe there is meant to be admirable or horrifying. Pope's use of “accepted” also has a challenge embedded in it, perhaps a bit of heresy. The prayers of the blameless are only

accepted because they are easy to fulfil, easier certainly than Eloisa's unspeakable worldly desires. Is it only spotless minds that have the luxury of an untroubled faith in the power of prayer? Pope doesn't quite come out and ask the question, but it's there in the background, like a memory of Milton's Satan, disparaging the very concept of such faultless and forgetful devotion.

Just as the grotto could be solitary and sociable, private and public, serious and ludicrous, Pope himself was forever torn between introvert and extrovert impulses. It is this version of Pope, so suspect in Dr Johnson's eyes, that is sometimes hard to glimpse through the refined and compact exterior of his favourite poetic form. It is a version of Pope that I would like to see more fully represented and appreciated in our culture today.

The full text of Dr Jones's talk can be found on our website on the News and Events page.

Volunteers and Trustees needed

After the successful conservation of the Grotto's South Chamber, our project is now entering a period of expansion and development. As a consequence, the Trust requires more volunteers and trustees.

Volunteers

Volunteers welcome guests at public open days, explain the history and contents of the Grotto, assist visitors to complete feedback forms and sell tickets and books at the front desk. Volunteers also assist at other events which the Trust organises.

Trustees

Trustees are responsible for fund-raising, the management of the grotto and its conservation. The Trust meets six times a year and trustees work on projects and

administration between meetings. If you have legal, fundraising or marketing skills you will be especially welcome as a trustee.

If you are interested in either of the roles, please contact us through our website.



Volunteer Pam Crisp and Chair of the Trustees David Cornwell welcome visitors at an Open Day