

Newsletter number 7, November 2021

Project News

Our conservation project finally starts

Having received the news of our successful application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund back in September 2019, we finally received formal Permission to Start the project from NLHF in January of this year.

A freelance Heritage Project Manager Victoria Northwood (pictured right) and Evaluation Consultant Chrissy Brooks (Lemon Drizzle Consultants) were recruited in the Spring, and following a tender process which took place during the



Summer and Autumn, Donald Insall Associates and Odgers Conservation Consultants have now been appointed to develop plans for Phase 2 of the Restoration of the Grotto. Both teams worked on Phase 1 in 2017, and we are delighted to be working with them again!

With Covid-19 restrictions gradually lifting we have managed to offer a range of events and activities during the course of the year, which you can read about in this newsletter.

Volunteering

Funding from the Lottery and the Richmond Civic Pride Fund made it possible for us to appoint an Outreach & Volunteers Officer this year to help us develop a Volunteering Strategy and Policy, and actively recruit some new volunteers to our team.

John Donegan joined us for a period of 6



months before taking up a fulltime role with the MCC at Lord's Cricket Ground, and has left our volunteer team in great shape!

Thank you to him, and to those members of our existing team who stuck with us during the pandemic and returned to help support our events this year. And welcome to all our new volunteers!

Open Days and Events

We have been delighted to welcome visitors back to the Grotto this year and are most grateful to the team at Radnor House School for helping us to facilitate these events while working to keep everyone safe.

Numbers have been limited to allow for social distancing, and entry restricted to those able to pre-book, and we have been sorry to turn away a number of 'walk ins' who in easier times would have been welcomed on the door. Our volunteers and visitors have met the challenge of remembering to take their lateral flow tests before visiting the site and bring masks with them brilliantly!

Our first two open days were held on 26 and 27 June, and were marketed jointly with our friends at Marble Hill

House as 'Grottos & Gardens' events, with ticket holders visiting the Grotto in the morning and Marble Hill in the afternoon. We participated in London Open House on 4 and 11 September, and held a further open day on 25 September as part of the Richmond 'Know Your Place' Festival.



We were excited to work with Marble Hill House to bring storyteller Giles Abbott's piece 'A Search for Perfection' to the Oval Lawn on 4 September. The weather was relatively kind,

and those who came along were fascinated to hear Giles talk about the life of Alexander Pope in a truly spellbinding way. Thank you to Cathy Cooper who took some wonderful photos on the day!

Upcoming Events - Booking Now Open!

Our programme of events continues into 2022, with a screening of 'A Virtual Arcadia' to be held on 6 January at Twickenham Exchange.

This interactive digital reconstruction of Pope's Villa and Garden, and the River Thames in 1740, has been developed over a number of years by Prof Paul Richens, drawing



on meticulous research, and using gaming technology.

The Winter Series of the London Luminaries Virtual Lectures will begin 19 January. For further information about these events, and links to on-line ticket sales, please visit the Events section of our website:

<https://popesgrotto.org.uk/events/>

Working with younger audiences

Our Audience Development Plan, completed in 2017 recommended that we seek meaningful engagement with young people from the local area, as well as maintaining our traditional audience base.

This has been an aspect of our work which we have been able to progress this year, thanks to our wonderful partners and funders.

In February and March we worked with Orleans House Gallery to develop Pope-inspired family learning activities which could be accessed on-line, and activities aimed at



young people seeking to achieve their Bronze Arts Award. Funding from Arts Council England enabled us to commission storyteller Giles Abbott to develop 'The Verse & the Curse': a Pope-inspired intervention which has been delivered in a range of local settings during the course of the year.

We enjoy a good relationship with Achieving for Children and were delighted in August to welcome a group of young people to the Grotto for a week-long volunteering placement, as part of the

Head2Work programme.

Memories of the Grotto

In September, we were welcomed by St Catherine's School to open the Grotto as part of an event for returning alumnae. This was a great opportunity to collect people's memories of the Grotto, and we were assisted in this by local post-graduate student, Indra Fallon, who volunteered her time to collect and transcribe reminiscences.

Indra writes: "I first became involved with the reminiscence project at Pope's Grotto earlier this year, while I was studying for my Masters at St. Mary's University, Strawberry Hill. I was looking for an appropriate project to undertake in order to complement my theoretical learning from my Masters.

I had heard about Pope's Grotto two years before, and was intrigued to learn more about it - especially as I have lived in and around the area for many years.

The oral interviews I undertook were devised to get the ex-pupils to discuss their memories of the grotto. The ladies shared many fun and exciting stories: for example, the grotto was a very dark place and the pupils recalled holding hands with their friends and running through the tunnel because they were scared of the dark. There were other stories too of the girls having sneaky cigarettes and being wary of getting caught, because the nuns were very strict and they were scared of them."