

Pope's Grotto has been saved for future generations

The Trustees of Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust are delighted to share the news that Pope's Grotto will be removed from the Heritage at Risk Register later this year following an extensive programme of conservation.

The Grade II* listed Grotto is all that remains of a Palladian villa and gardens created by Alexander Pope on the banks of the River Thames at Twickenham. It is loaded with significance for British culture and for the birth of the English Landscape Garden Movement. It was added to the Heritage at Risk Register in 2001.

Over the past year, works to conserve and re-present the Grotto have been completed by a team led by architects Donald Insall Associates and Odgers Conservation Consultants. Works undertaken by Taylor Pearce Ltd have included lifting a later concrete floor to reveal earlier brickwork and the cleaning, resetting and replacement of the varied mineral samples which formed the final stage of Pope's interior design for the Grotto. The Grotto's underlying structure, and changes to it over time have been revealed by the works, along with evidence of water features referred to by Pope and 18th-century visitors to the Grotto.

Historic England has confirmed the Grotto will be removed from the 2023 Heritage at Risk Register at its annual update in November.

Chair of Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust, David Cornwell said: "The Trustees are absolutely delighted to see this important project come to fruition. We are most grateful to all the organisations and individuals who have worked so very hard over many years to support us in restoring and conserving the Grotto. We look forward to re-opening the Grotto to visitors and continuing to educate new audiences about Alexander Pope and his works thanks to our thriving network of committed volunteers."

Conservation works to the fragile Grotto floor are ongoing. Once these are completed, the Trust will be able to resume our programme of Open Days and welcome visitors into the Grotto once again.

The dates of these will be advertised on the Trust's website and notified to members of the Grotto mailing list, which can be joined at: <https://popesgrotto.org.uk/subscribe/>.

Ayaka Takaki, Associate Director, Donald Insall Associates, said: "It was important to us and the Pope's Grotto Preservation Trust that the proposed works were informed by and incorporated the Grotto's rich history, which has been partially preserved through Pope's surviving letters, sketches by William Kent and through physical fabric on site."

David Odgers, Odgers Conservation Consultants, said: "It has been a great privilege for OCC to play a central role in the Pope's Grotto conservation project. The identification and in some instances, removal of past restorations has enabled a greater understanding of the original structure and the many challenges in conserving the fabric have been carefully addressed and resolved at every stage."

Becky Davison, Conservator, Taylor Pearce Ltd, said: "Being aware of the significance and fragility of the grotto we carried out our work conscious of the importance of preserving the historic fabric while carrying out repairs in a sympathetic manner in both material composition and visually. We managed to stabilise the old and integrate the new while providing a glimpse into the historic construction of the grotto."

This important project has been funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with grants also received from Historic England, the H B Allen Charitable Trust, the Historic Houses Foundation, the Heritage of London Trust, the Swire Charitable Trust, the John and Ruth Howard Trust and the Idlewild Trust.

Stuart McLeod, Director of England - London & South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "It's fantastic news that the Pope's Grotto will be removed from the Heritage at Risk register thanks to the brilliant work of the restoration project. Thanks to a £247,200 grant from money raised by National Lottery players, it has been given a new lease of life and saved for generations to come. Conserving and saving heritage at risk is a core part of what we do, and we're incredibly proud that the Heritage Fund has been able to support this project to make this fantastic news possible."

The Grotto's conservation forms part of a broader project 'The Genius of the Place', which has been designed to bring the life and work of Alexander Pope to a wider audience. Activities have taken place at the Grotto, and at local schools and heritage organisations, including Strawberry Hill House, Marble Hill House and Orleans House. Feedback from people attending these events has helped to shape new interpretation placed at the entrance to the Grotto, and the Trust has also drawn on a digital reconstruction of Pope's gardens and the 18th-century River Thames created by Professor Paul Richens and developed thanks to funding from Arts Council England.

Tom Foxall, Regional Director for London and the South East at Historic England, said: "The transformation of Pope's Grotto is a huge achievement and a credit to all those involved in the campaign and conservation work. A strong partnership of heritage specialists and funders, including Historic England, over many years has been key to this success. I am glad to confirm the Grotto can be removed from the Heritage at Risk Register."