



Berkshire Follies

Issue 27

June 2010

What's on in June...

- **01—On sale:** the new edition of Pevsner's Berkshire.
- **13—Annual General Meeting** at the Dissenters' Chapel in Kensal Green Cemetery, Harrow Road, London W10. The meeting starts at 2.30pm.

And coming up...

- **04, 10-11 July—Open day:** Lord Berner's Folly at Faringdon, Oxfordshire.
- **10-11 July—North Lincolnshire weekend:** The visit starts with a tour of the Brocklesbury Estate, including the Grotto and Root House, Arabella Aufrere's Temple, Holgate Monument, Newsham Lodge, Memorial Arch and James Wyatt's Mausoleum for Sophia Aufrere. The visit also includes fish and chips at Cleethorpes and a tour of the town including its Plotland development called the 'Fitties'.
- **15 August—Annual Garden Party** at Hall Barn, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire.

The Folly Fellowship

Articles, pictures, comments and feedback for the e-Bulletin should be sent to andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk. All other correspondence should be sent to membership@follies.org.uk.



Temple Island at Remenham
Photo: Colinmel on Flickr

This month sees the release of a much updated edition of **Pevsner's Berkshire**, which is the latest in the new format guides to his Buildings of England series. To mark the event, this edition of the Bulletin looks at some of the follies in the Royal County of Berkshire.

Being part of a series the new book has kept to the same area that Pevsner covered in his first edition in 1966. It means that the book includes Berkshire's old county town of Abingdon, Lord Berners' Folly at Faringdon and large parts of the Downs around Wantage that were moved into Oxfordshire during the 1974 boundary change.

The new edition is edited by Dr Geoffrey Tyack, author of the Blue Guide to Oxford and Cambridge,



and by Dr Simon Bradley who edited the City of London and Westminster Pevsners. With 800 pages plus maps and over 100 colour photographs, the new book is twice the size of the old one, and lists the best of Berkshire's new and historic buildings. It costs £35.00 and is on general sale through all good bookshops and from Yale at www.yalebooks.co.uk.

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This re-launch of the Bulletin follows a new format which we hope is easier to read and print. If you wish to comment on the design or any other aspect, please send your feedback to the usual address.

Andrew Plumridge

With most people observing the county from the M4 motorway, it is not surprising that Berkshire's best known folly overlooks the highway. **Wilder's Folly**, as it should properly be known, stands close to junction 12 (Theale) and is a simple brick structure with an open arcade at ground level, a series of gothic-arched windows in the two floors above and the remains of a castellated top that would have hidden a lead-covered flat roof.

Despite its prominence, little is known of the folly's history except that it was built in 1769 by Rev. Henry Wilder of Sulham House during his courtship of Joan Thoyt of nearby Sulhamstead House. By erecting his folly on Nunhide Hill, it would have been seen from both estates and served as a belvedere with an external timber staircase



providing access to a painted first floor room with glazed windows. At some time during the second half of the 19th century the windows were bricked up and the tower used as a dovecote.

Over the years the folly has been known by a variety of names including Pincent's Kiln (from its proximity to Pincent's Manor), Nunhide Tower and Flint's Folly. Maybe it is time to agree to use its true name of Wilder's Folly.

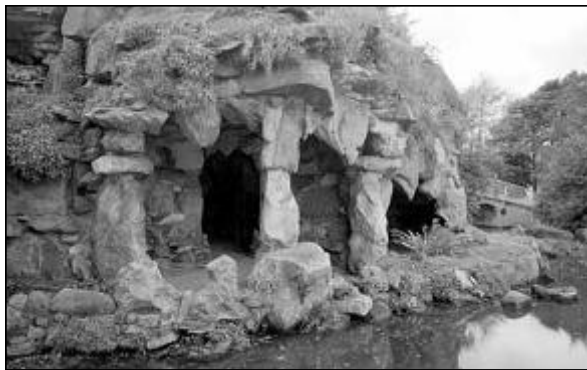
Equally well known, but much less accessible to the public is the grotto at **Ascot Place**. Since it was first built by Thomas Sandby at the end of the 18th century, Ascot Place has had a string of celebrity owners, including H J Heinz. In 1989, it was bought by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayad bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the head of the

Wilder's Folly. Photos: Bill Nicholls and Graham Horn (top) at Geograph.



Abu Dhabi royal family and President of the UAE, since when he has been busy restoring the mansion and its gardens. His latest addition is the erection of a brick wall around the perimeter of the estate—all 28 miles of it—much to the irritation of some local residents.

The main folly is the grotto of 1740-50, consisting of three chambers lined with flint, tufa and stalactites covered in feldspar. In an article for the *Gardener's Magazine* of 1829 (p.568), J C Loudon claims it was 'built to the designs of Daniel Agace, owner of Ascot Place' using the masons Turnbull and Scott,' but records appear to show that Agace didn't acquire the estate until 1787. Loudon also attributes the Corinthian rotunda to



The exterior and interior of Ascot Place grotto. Photo: Eric de Mare, NMR



Turnbull but other sources say it was by Agace's niece C C Ferard who improved the gardens in the early 1900s. According to the listing, she is also credited with adding the Gothic seat and the dry bridge with its bas-relief of a woman's head over the western arch and two monkeys above the other.

There is a grotto in the grounds of **Whitknights Park**, which in

1798 was home to the Marquis of Blandford, later the 5th Duke of Marlborough. He used it as a base for lavish and wild entertainment, adding a grotto (recently restored) to the edge of the eleven-acre lake and planting hundreds of rare and exotic plants in its grounds. When they were finished the gardens were considered to be among the most extravagant of their day, matching the furnishings in the

house and contents of the wine cellar. The gaiety came to an abrupt end in 1819 when the Marquis was declared bankrupt and the estate sold. It is claimed that the house itself was demolished in 1840 by a mob of the then Duke's angry creditors.

The grotto at **Basildon Park** has long gone, but two in the private gardens of **Windsor Castle** are still standing and used by the present Royal Family. Probably built for George III, the grottos are accessed through a series of tunnels cut into the chalk, each lined with flint, marble, pudding-stone and clumps of burnt brick. It is fair to say that they lack the splendour of the one at Ascot Place, but few grottoes in the world could do that.

The real treasures at Windsor are at **Frogmore Gardens**, where there is a Tea House designed for Queen Victoria in 1869 and an Indian Kiosk taken by Lord Canning from the Kaiserbejh at Lucknow and presented to Queen Victoria in 1858 to mark the end of

the Indian Mutiny. Its most important folly, however, is the Gothick Temple or sham ruin, designed by James Wyatt in 1793.



The Indian Kiosk (above) and Gothick Temple at Frogmore Gardens. Photo: Haryoung on Flickr



Close Windsor's border with Winkfield is **Cranbourne Lodge** (below), a three-storey brick tower built in 1808 as an extension to a house occupied by Edward, Duke of York. It is claimed that Princess Charlotte was incarcerated here in 1814 after falling in love with a minor Prussian Prince who was thought to be beneath her.



Windsor also has a Gothick fronted sham ruin in the garden of a house in Bachelors Acre, which *H+R Follies* says was used as a cooling house or dairy.

The Lodge and Pavilion, Monkey Island, Bray



The richer members of Berkshire Society have always enjoyed living on the banks of the River Thames, and it is here that the best follies are still found. In 1723 Charles Spencer, the 3rd Duke of Marlborough, bought the island of "Monks Eyot" at Bray and erected for himself a small lodge to use as

Fuller-Maitland after it had been damaged by lightning and erected in his meadow in 1837 to mark Queen Victoria's accession to the Throne.

Further along the track is **Park Place**, the one-time home of Field-Marshal Henry Seymour Conway, a former Governor of Jersey. As a token of their appreciation of his service, the people of Jersey gave him a Neolithic stone circle from the Mont de la Ville at St. Helier, which Conway shipped to Berkshire and used as a romantic folly.

He also bought stone from the ruins of Reading Abbey to build a Cyclopean Bridge at the bottom of 'Happy Valley', adding a grotto and obelisk at the other end. The bridge supports the A321 Henley-Wargrave road, and was designed by Thomas Pitt, Lord Camelford. Conway's cousin, Horace Walpole delighted in the bridge, writing of it on 7 October 1793: *'The works of Park Place go on bravely; the cottage will be very pretty and the bridge sublime, composed of loose rocks, that will appear to have been tumbled together there; the very wreck of the deluge. One stone is fourteen hundredweight. It will be worth a hundred of Palladio's bridges, that are only fit to be used in an opera.'*

Farley Castle (below) stands in the hamlet of Farley Hill, to the south of Reading. It is a mock castle built in 1808-10 by the architect

a quiet retreat. He also built an octagonal fishing pavilion, which at first sight appeared to be built in stone but when the Duke was invited to tap it, he is said to have delighted at the discover that it was actually painted timber. Its interior was decorated by the French artist Andien de Clermont, who painted the domed ceiling with monkeys pursuing a range of river sports.

Upstream of Bray is **Temple Island** at Remenham, on which James Wyatt built a fishing lodge in the classical Grecian style in 1769-71, and as an eye-catcher to Fawley Court on the Buckinghamshire side of the river.

Also at Remenham, down a dirt track off the Marlow-Henley road, is a 9 metre high spire sitting on a plinth in the middle of a field. It turns out that it was once the spire of St. Bride's Church in the City of London, but rescued by Ebenezer



W. Fellows for E. Stephenson. In the 1970s and 80s it was used as a private school, but burned to the ground in 1990 after a group of squatters had been removed from the site. It has since been restored and converted to three luxury houses.

Also on the outskirts of Reading is Purley Hall, built in 1609 by Queen Anne's grandfather. In its grounds is the **Culloden Pavilion**, built in 1746 by Frances Hawes and 'erected according to tradition to commemorate the Battle of Culloden' in the previous year. The brick and flint pavilion fell into disrepair by the end of the 19th century but was restored in 1913. When the authors of *H+M Follies* last saw it, they described the interior decorations as 'virulent Datsun ochre'.

The combination of brick and



Hop Castle at Winterbourne. Photo: Derrick Green

flint is common in the western half of the county, where bricks were once made from clays lining the valleys and flints collected from the chalk hills. It appears on **Hop Castle** at Winterbourne, built in

1765 by John Elwes and described by Pevsner as 'a Georgian hunting lodge and the most delectable of follies' (see: *Bulletin* #5). It re-occurs on the



Coach House at Bloreng House, Ashampstead (above) where there is also the **Vicar's Pulpit** folly in its garden. The pulpit is actually a two-storey brick tower that was erected in the 1830s by tea dealer, insurance agent and enthusiastic evangelist Isaac Septimus Nullis (1828-68) as a place to practice his oratory. It seems that the local parishioners refused to endure his rehearsals so Nullis practiced instead on the sheep and cows grazing in the meadow below.

Lastly, **Rebecca's Well** at Wargrave, was built in 1870 by Rev. Grenville Phillimore to give clean water to the residents of Crazies Hill. So grateful were they that the treated the well as a shrine .



Further information on Berkshire's follies is available from the following:

- Headley, G. and Meulenkamp, W., *Follies, Grottoes and Garden Buildings*, Aurum Press (1999).
- Jones, B., *Follies and Grottoes*, Constable (1979).
- Watson, M., *Curiosities of Berkshire*, S.B. Publications (1996)
- www.follytowers.com

Gobbets

- This month's Images of England website has a feature on follies, including Jack Fuller's mausoleum, Jack the Treacle Eater, the Coniston Water and Upcott House eyecatchers, Lord Berners Tower and White Nancy.

See—www.imagesofengland.org.uk

- English Heritage has announced a £200,000 grant towards the restoration of the Rotunda Temple at Wentworth Castle in Yorkshire.

See—www.yorkshirepost.co.uk

- Pontypool's folly tower has been shortlisted for the Warburton Picnic Award as the UK's favourite picnic spot. Voting closed on 24 April. The winning venue will receive £1,000—there's lovely!

See—www.southwalesargus.co.uk

- Swansea Council is exploring ways to secure the future of the Sketty Chapter House belvedere after Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats took up residence—as a protected roost, the council has a duty to protect the roost from loss and damage.

See—www.swansea.gov.uk

- Painswick's Red House has been saved from collapse after steel rods were inserted into the walls to prevent movement that would have brought down the domed ceiling and disturb a colony of Lesser Horseshoe bats.

See—www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/gloucestershire/8672620.stm

- North Craven Building Preservation Trust has acquired the north wing of The Folly at Settle thanks to a loan from the Architectural Heritage Fund. It means that the folly is now returned to a single ownership and will be restored.

See—www.cravenherald.co.uk/news/8161840/

- Pope's Villa at Cross Deep in Twickenham has been put on the market for £7-million, raising fears about the future of the grotto beneath the former boys school.

See—www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/local/richmondnews

Unless otherwise stated, all pictures used in this edition of the Bulletin are taken by the editor or from the Folly Picture Library in Eindhoven. We are grateful to all of the photographers for the generous use of their pictures. All views and comments that have been expressed are those of the authors and are not necessarily the opinion or belief of The Folly Fellowship.

Gazeteer

Ascot

- Grotto and garden buildings group

Ashampstead

- Vicar's Pulpit Tower

Basildon

- Peacock Pavilion at Child Beale Wildlife Park and the Eyecatcher

Bray

- Monkey Island

Cranbourne

- Cranbourne Lodge

Farley Hill

- Farley Castle

Purley

- Culloden Pavilion

Reading

- Grotto and World's Largest Lion

Remenham

- Fawley Temple, Druids Circle, Spire and Cyclope Bridge

Sulham

- Flint's Tower

Sunninghill

- Tattlingstone Manor Folly

Wargrave

- Rebecca's Well on Crazies Hill

Windsor

- Grotto and Sham Ruin

Winterbourne

- Hop Castle