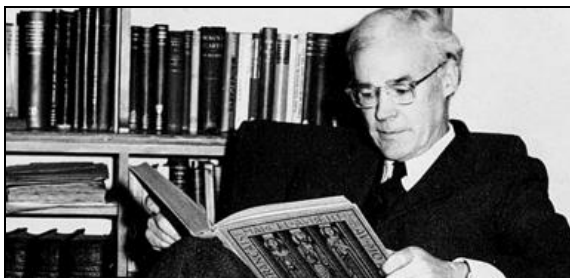




There was an exciting start to 2008 with news that Gilly Drummond had been awarded an OBE in the New Years Honours List. Gilly, who is our most active patron, is also Chairman of the Association of Garden Trusts and a Commissioner of English Heritage where she heads its Historic Parks and Gardens Panel. Those of us who have had the genuine pleasure of working alongside her know that Gilly has a unique gift for making all things possible and can be relied upon to provide a helping hand and practical support. So it is a pleasure to know that the work of one of life's truly lovely people has at last been recognised, and we send to Gilly our warmest love and congratulations. Of particular joy is the fact that the award is given for services to the environment, which will have pleased her no end.



The New Year also saw an announcement that Sir Howard Colvin had died at the age of 88. For such a physically small man, Howard was a giant in the world of architectural history, giving us among other things that most invaluable reference book *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*. Mike Cousins will provide a tribute for inclusion in the next edition of *Follies* magazine, and a more detailed one when he reviews the fourth edition of Howard's most famous work due to be released in May of this year. Having known Howard at Oxford and worked with him for a short period, I nonetheless want to add a short note of my own here.



Howard was Senior Member of the Oxford University Architectural Society during my period as its President, and I have very fond memories of my meetings with him at St. John's, of our talks

during visits and whilst walking back to College after evening lectures in the St. Cross Building. I chatted to him about the idea of a folly society long before doing so with Gwyn, Wim and Mike, and will always be grateful for his kind and friendly encouragement. Not surprisingly he was one of our first and longest members, and he donated funds to help us on our way. Quite properly he warned me that I would never make my name or fortune in buildings of such frivolity and misunderstanding, and how true his words have proved to be. In common with all of the glowing tributes that I have seen following his death, I treasure the fact that he always had time for us students and freely shared with us his vast knowledge and understanding of architecture. We knew then that we were privileged to be working under the genius and modesty of a great man.

Andrew Plumridge
andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk

Notice is given of the
2007 Annual General Meeting
to be held at 3:00pm
on Saturday, 08 March 2008,
at The Corn Exchange,
Faringdon, Oxfordshire.

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The meeting is open for anyone to attend but only paid-up members can vote on any issue. If you can attend or wish to record your apologies, please write to the Secretary at woodcocki@yahoo.co.uk or by post to 1 Ladysmith Road, St. Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5PZ. If you have a motion for consideration, or are unable to attend but would like a copy of the Accounts or Minutes to be sent to you, please use the same addresses and kindly quote your membership number when you write.

2007 Annual General Meeting

For those who can arrive at Faringdon in the morning, a guided tour has been arranged to visit Lord Berners' famous tower and climb to the top. Arrangements are also being finalised to let us visit the follies of Berners' great friend Robert Heber-Percy at Faringdon House, which is in the centre of the town. The tour starts at 11am at the tower, and will incur a nominal charge of £3 per person. Tea and biscuits will be served at the end of the meeting, but you will need to make your own arrangements for lunch, either bringing a packed lunch or visiting one of the many pubs in the town centre.

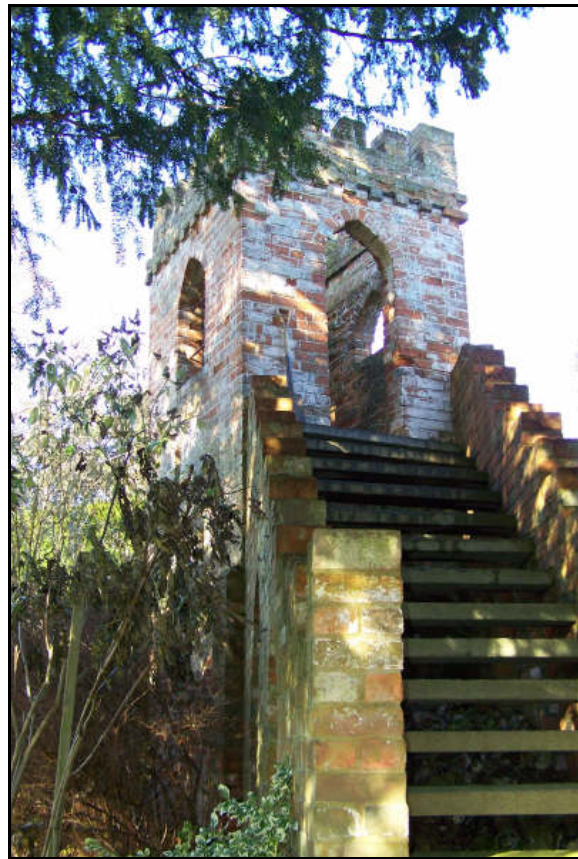
Full details of the event are available from woodcocki@yahoo.co.uk. Payments for joining the tour may be sent in advance or paid on the day.

Bloreng House, Ashampstead

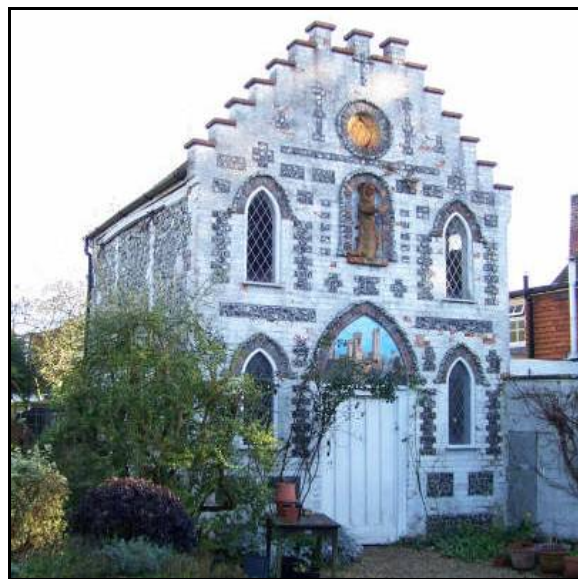
Bloreng House stands in the centre of the West Berkshire village of Ashampstead, and comprises three buildings: the house, an outbuilding and a Bothy: the next door Bloreng Cottage used to be the Coach House. All three buildings are lived in. Its principal delight, however, lies at the end of the garden shrouded in trees and shrubs, and is a rarity even in folly terms.

Set at the end of a long and picturesque garden, away from any line of axis or other visual significance stands a two-storey brick tower known as the Vicar's Pulpit. It was built during the 1830s by the local Methodist Preacher called Isaac Septimus Nullis as a private place to rehearse his sermons. He had wanted to practice in his chapel but it seems that his congregation was less than enthusiastic for sitting through both the dress-rehearsal and opening night performance, and so he had erected the simple brick tower as a place where he could practice in front of the sheep and cows which grazed in the field beyond.

When the current owner bought the property the tower was in a bad state of repair, with one wall and the main steps both showing signs of collapse. He appointed local architect Andrew Plumridge (yes, the very same) to carry out the work, but with subtle changes to improve its appearance and performance. For example, a chamber beneath the steps that was rumoured to be filled with emeralds from the Caribbean was dug out to reduce the risk of damp in the brick walls: it turned out to be filled with nothing but soil. It was further improved by replacing the worn brick steps with pre-cast concrete treads, and the replacement of damaged bricks and flints. All of this made restoration more economic, especially since the alterations attracted value added tax at 0% instead of the standard 17½, and the bricks steps could easily be returned at some future date when funds were available, using the removed flints and spare bricks that are stored in the void beneath the steps.



Near the house are brick and flint stables with a decorative crown-stepped gable at the front. When the current owner purchased the house the windows were boarded over and missing, so new ones were installed. Likewise the missing figure of St. Francis of Assisi high on the front wall was replaced with a resin replica. The roof contained nesting boxes for pigeons but their entrance holes in the first floor side wall were permanently blocked up. Above the entrance door a painting was added by a local artist, copied from a photograph of San Gimignano, a walled medieval town in Tuscany.



The same artist also produced a wall painting of a cottage on a perimeter wall in the far corner of the garden.

On one occasion, during filming at the tower for a Japanese TV Company, the local vicar went missing at the crucial moment, so a Churchwarden was persuaded to don the cassock and preach from the top. It was disappointing to note that cattle grazing in the field next door were obviously less interested in religion than their predecessors!

Derrick Green

Folly of the Month: Coplestone's Folly at Offwell, Devon

Edward Coplestone was born in 1776 in the Devon village of Offwell, near Honiton. After being educated at Oxford, he took up a post as tutor at Oriol College in 1797. Five years later he was appointed Oxford Professor of Poetry, where he is said to have gained a reputation for his clever literary criticism and sound 'latinity'. In 1814 he was elevated to Provost at Oriol and was thus influential in the choice of Fellows who were later prominent members of the Oxford Movement.

In 1826 Coplestone moved into the Church and was appointed Dean of Chester. The following year he was consecrated as Bishop of Llandaff, where he was able to give his support to the new movement for church restoration in Wales, and see the building of more than twenty churches there.



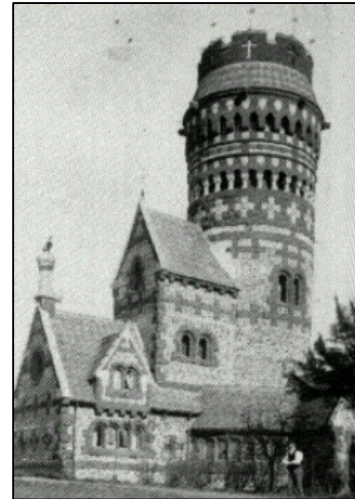
Since the Bishop's Palace at Llandaff had been sold shortly before Coplestone's investiture,

he spent some of his time living in a private house in Chepstow and the remainder back at his family home in Offwell. His descendents still live in the Devon house but are almost too keen to deny the legend that the Bishop built his 80-foot-high tower in 1828 in the hope of keeping an eye on his diocese near Cardiff and to watch over his flock.

Recollections: Memories of a lost folly at Finedon, Northamptonshire

With its new use as a terminus for Eurostar, Sir George Gilbert Scott's glorious station at St. Pancras has been receiving its fair share of publicity of late, albeit with too much focus on having Europe's longest champagne bar. At the end of the World War II it had a less important role as the starting point for journeys to Manchester on the old LMS line. I say this because earlier this month Philip Jones kindly sent to me an extract from the *LMS Railway Route Guide* published in 1947 showing the long-vanished Volta Tower at Finedon in Northamptonshire.

Perhaps showing an age that Philip would rather we ignored he recalled being taken to see the tower as a very small child, but only having the dimmest memory of it. As is often the case with small boys, he remembers more being impressed to learn of its collapse a year or so later, killing the occupant who had showed him round.



The guide describes Finedon as a 'place of towers' because the local Squire had a passion for them. There was a water-tower of a 'most unusual height', two more in the Hall grounds and an old windmill that had been given a Tudor appearance and converted to a house. But, 'the *chef d'œuvre* is the Volta Tower, also well seen from the line.' The tower was known to Barbara Jones who included a short piece about it in her first edition of *Follies and Grottoes*, saying that 'It was built to the memory of a ship called *Volta* that foundered on the coast of Africa in September 1863. William Digby Dolben, one of the family who built the tower, was drowned, aged 24.' She went on to describe that it was 'attached to a stone farmhouse, small but uncomplicated, with a variety of steep intersecting gables. The tower is round and fat with a bulge of machicolation which, contrary to normal practice, carries castellations even narrower than the body

of the tower, the gap being filled with a sloping collar of ornamental tiles. Everything is ornamental; the small windows are Norman, eaves corbelled, chimneys fancy, roofs all patterned, and two colours of rough-hewn stone are craftily worked so that the bottom of the building is light, with dark bands and crosses, while the top of the tower is dark with light crosses. There are gargoyles, cross-slits, and a weathervane on each castellation', all of which, she concluded, made it a 'fine plump tower.' The tower collapsed on 16 November 1951 killing Mr and Mrs Northen who lived there at the time.



Mackworth Dolben captioned his buildings with black lettering painted on ornate scrolls, causing Juliet Smith to say in her *Shell Guide to Northamptonshire* that 'The ironstone Victorian fantasies of Mr Mackworth Dolben, which include the Hall and the Bell, "the oldest inn in England", are scattered through the village and surrounding countryside in an enjoyable welter of gables and curly lettering.' Still visible are the Ice Tower built in 1864, Exmill Cottage (19C) and Wellington Tower erected in 1815 by Charles Arbuthnot MP to commemorate the Duke's victory at Waterloo.

Gobbets

- The Painshill Park Trust is offering free entry to the gardens on Wednesdays throughout January and February (www.painshill.co.uk), but if you can wait a bit longer, why not enjoy a guided tour in the company of Iain Gray who will be taking us there later in the year. The gardens will also be prettier in June.

Forthcoming Events

Saturday, 8 March 2008 – Guided tour of Lord Berners' glorious twentieth-century folly tower (see December *Foll-e*) and Robert Heber-Percy's folly at Faringdon, Oxfordshire, followed by the Annual General Meeting in the Corn Exchange. Full details are given on pages 1 and 2 of this Bulletin, and from woodcocki@yahoo.co.uk.

Sunday, 13 April 2008 – Tour of Somerset follies with Jonathan Holt. Further details published in the January *Foll-e*, and from jm.holt@virgin.net

Sunday, 15 June 2008 – A tour of Painshill Park, Surrey with Iain Gray. We last visited Painshill in 1995, since when much has been achieved by our friends at the Painshill Park Trust, so there is even more to see at one of England's finest gardens. Places are limited to 60 people so early booking is

essential if you want to come along. Tickets cost £15 for members and slightly more for their guests. By way of a tease, there is an optional mystery event starting at 10:30am that morning, which is not to be missed.

For further information contact Iain Gray at 020-8870 4567 or gg@candycollect.co.uk

Sunday, 13 July 2008 – A tour of Derbyshire follies. Further information is available from Joy Cotton on 01332 705165.

If you have an idea for a visit, contacts that could facilitate one, or feel able to organise one on our behalf, or if you simply want to know more about the ones that have already been organised for this year, contact Elizabeth on 0121-447 7106 or by e-mail to follywaters@onetel.com.

Caption Competition

This unusual sight was captured by Rex Critchlow during our tour of Lothian Follies at the end of last year and shows John Ownsworth peeking beneath the door of the Wemyss Family Mausoleum at Gosford House. There's a bottle of Brouilly to the person who provides the best caption to fit the picture before 06 March. Answers to andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk: the winner will be announced at the AGM.



Picture credits: Mrs Gilly Drummond, DL – www.english-heritage.org.uk; Sir Howard Colvin, CVO – www.timesonline.co.uk; Blorange House follies – Derrick Green; Copplestone's Folly – www.bbc.co.uk/devon (Kimberley Dickinson); Volta Tower – from *Finedon Revealed* by J L H Bailey; Wemyss Mausoleum – Rex Critchlow.