



Panoramic view of the Nek Chand rock garden at Chandigarh, India

**M**onty Don's series *Around the World in 80 Gardens* is proving to be a big hit, and is taking us on a fabulously relaxing journey through a variety of gardens around the globe. It has also shown us a surprisingly large number of follies, including Captain Cook's obelisk at Botany Bay, the Edward James garden at Las Pozas in Mexico, and Nek Chand's amazing Rock Garden in the Indian city of Chandigarh. In doing so the BBC has reinforced the important symbiosis between architecture and landscape, something that its gardening team has otherwise ignored in their pursuit of basic horticulture. Even when they have had a diversion into architecture the emphasis has normally been on the Charlie Dimmock style pergola that could be erected by Tommy Walsh in half an hour and for less than a hundred quid. If this series has shown us anything it is that great gardens need an architectural framework as much as they need beds and borders. So come on Monty, when you eventually return to Berryfields and start filming the next series of *Gardener's World*, show us that you have learned something from your journey and start building a folly or two? In the meantime, for anyone who may have missed an episode, a book of the series has been published by Weidenfield and Nicolson (ISBN 9780297844501) and a DVD will be on sale from March 2008.



As a final reminder, the Annual General Meeting takes place at 3pm on Saturday, 8 March, in the Corn Exchange at Faringdon, Oxfordshire. It is preceded by a visit to Lord Berners' tower and the Heber-Percy folly at Faringdon House, all starting at the tower at 11am. As an introduction to the visit, this month's e-Bulletin takes a quick look at the two folly builders and introduces to us their extraordinary lives and characters.

## The Folly Builders of Faringdon: Lord Berners and Robert Heber-Percy

**T**he distinction of English eccentric is abused so much these days that it has virtually no currency left. One of the last men to be worthy of the tribute, however, was Gerald Tyrwhitt-Wilson, the 14<sup>th</sup> Baron Berners, who was also a talented novelist, painter and composer.

Berners inherited his title and property in 1918 after a short period as a diplomat. The inheritance brought much needed financial stability as well as fashionable properties in London, Rome and Faringdon where his true character was allowed to flourish. Although this entitled him to sit in the House of Lords, he only went there once because one of the Lord Bishops stole his umbrella and he said he could never be comfortable working alongside Society's villains and beggars.

Faringdon House was where Berners felt most at home, alongside his whippets with their diamond collars, and a large numbers of doves coloured red, white and blue. The colouring was achieved with vegetable dyes supplied by Vera Sudeikina, the later wife of Stravinsky, who also showed Berners how to make blue mayonnaise.

Although he loved his own animals, Berners had little patience for those that belonged to others. He erected a sign at Faringdon saying that *Dogs will be shot; cats will*



be whipped although none ever were. One exception to this rule was a horse belonging to Penelope Betjeman that was allowed to join them for tea in the drawing room. This honour was in part due to Berners' love of Penelope, who after her conversion to Catholicism encouraged him to do the same but to no avail, presumably because he still felt that the church was full of umbrella thieves! He also trained a parrot to walk beneath a bowler hat so that guests at Faringdon believed the hat was moving by itself.

His preferred method of travel was his Rolls Royce in which he installed a small piano. He only used the train when he had to but never liked to share his compartment with strangers so at each station he would don a black skull-cap and a pair of spectacles before leaning out of the window and beckon invitingly to fellow travellers. If someone felt bold enough to get in he would produce a large clinical thermometer every few minutes to take his own temperature, studying each reading with an air of increasing gloom. Needless to say, the passenger soon changed carriage.



In 1935 he set about building his folly tower on a hill to the east of the town. When asked what it was for, he is said to have responded that "The great point of the tower is that it will be entirely useless." The story of its building is well told in *H+M Follies* so need not be repeated here, except to recall that Berners was worried that people might consider putting it to an all too obvious use, so he erected another notice saying: *Members of the public committing suicide from this tower do so at their own risk.*

After the war, Berners' health and interest in life began to fade. For a man who feared boredom he feared even more that he was becoming a bore himself. Despite this he remained thoroughly charming, and in a postscript to his biography, Mark Amory reported that the doctor attending Berners "during his last years refused to send a bill, saying that the pleasure of his company had been payment enough."

Berners died at the age of sixty-six. A week before his death he made a Will leaving almost everything to his friend Robert Heber-Percy whom he met at the age of 50 and lived with for some 15 years. The tower was one of the exceptions, being left in trust to the people of Faringdon.

Robert Heber-Percy was himself something of an eccentric and an incredibly likable character. He had a brief but lively career in the Kings Dragoon Guards before being drummed out for misbehaviour, and was a member of the Secret Service in Arabia during the war because, he said, "The Arabs like good manners and I have them." He also had a job as an extra in Hollywood and worked in a Lyons Corner House until he spilled soup over a customer after an argument.

Being a larger than life figure, Robert was an obvious attraction to Lord Berners who was quickly enchanted by his dashing good looks, his elegant appearance and uninhibited behaviour. Being the youngest son of Algernon Heber-Percy, a relative of the Dukes of Northumberland, he was also accepted in social circles where he was noted for his repartee and practical jokes.

After Berners died Robert directed his life toward the beautification of their Faringdon estate, where he rode with hounds and ran an undertaker business. He also built an exotic swimming pool opposite the Classical Orangery, complete with giant gryphons and a changing room floor inlaid with old pennies. He was an early bird, a charming host and was more often than not found working in the fields of the estate. He died in 1987 at the age of 75.

## Folly of the Month: The Gazebo at Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria

The beautiful parish church of St Mary in Kirkby Lonsdale is one of the ecclesiastical gems of south Cumbria, helped enormously by its picturesque setting and a spectacular interior with diamond carved Norman columns similar to the ones inside Durham Cathedral, a three-decker pulpit that was built in 1615 (but modified in 1866), and an alabaster Reredos complete with winged creatures and the Paschal Lamb picked out in mosaics. In the new churchyard is something of a surprise in the form of a two-storey Georgian tower with a staircase to one side.



Little is known about the tower, except that it was never intended to be a watch house because

it was built before this part of the churchyard was formed. In fact it turns out to be a gazebo that was originally attached to the adjoining vicarage and incorporated into the church grounds when they were extended.

Its location is no surprise given the glorious view that it affords across the Lune Valley. It was from here that Turner painted his *View of the River Lune* in 1822, of what is now called Ruskin's View. The name, by the way, was adopted after John Ruskin was so impressed by Turner's painting that he wrote "I do not know in all my own country, still less in France or Italy, a place more naturally divine." Given its provenance it is curious to know why the view is named after Ruskin and not Turner in honour of the man who first drew attention to it!

## FRENCH FOLLIES

Pieter and Rita Boogaart are trying to update the list of follies in France that appeared in *Follies* magazine # 2 and in subsequent articles. If you know any more follies there, please e-mail details to them before they leave for their tour of France in April/May. They will follow up all leads, starting in Paris before travelling all over the country.

Please send details to [pieterboogaart@hetnet.nl](mailto:pieterboogaart@hetnet.nl)

## Ocampo's Pagoda at Mia Quimpo

**T**ucked away in the Quiapo district of the Philippines capital Manila stands a pagoda that was built in 1935 by Jose Mariano Ocampo as the headquarters of his estate agency business. Its appearance above the contrasting streets of this poor and derelict part of town is as surprising as its survival over the past 70 years, which owes more to luck than anything else.

Ocampo was a lawyer but earned his living as an estate agent. He was married to a half-German called Luisa Mueller, with whom he had five daughters and a son. He also had a great sense of fun and a penchant for life and anything unusual. His venture into architecture began when he set about improving his traditional wood and stone house, adding window grilles that looked like huge spiders webs and putting stone penguins above the gate posts. He was, however, frustrated in his life-long desire to erect a Japanese Pagoda in which he could house his growing collection of Japanese art.



The 1930s were an exciting time for the Philippines, helped by the financial and commercial prosperity that was brought by the Americans. Its people would often promenade the boulevards wearing the latest in US clothing and cruise the streets in Packards and Fords. The Americans also introduced reinforced concrete to the islands, as a way of erecting large buildings. Ocampo was quick to see the possibility of using this technique for his huge pagoda instead of the traditional method of hanging its many tiers from a central timber post as a way of counteracting the effects of earthquakes. Armed with the newly acquired prosperity that his business had provided, he set about achieving his dream with the help of Maximo Paterno and Juan Cortez, two structural engineers who understood better the use and limits of the material. The result was a massive structure of bizarre proportions and appearance, blending the best of East and West, including a curious medieval-looking tower with a dragon relief and traditional Japanese lantern.



Ocampo never occupied the pagoda. Shortly after its completion in 1939 the Philippines became embroiled in World War II and the building was used as an air raid shelter. By the end of the war most of the city had been razed to the ground with the notable exception of Ocampo's pagoda; it even survived an otherwise devastating earthquake in 1992 when a section of the tower collapsed onto one of the lower roofs. Today, despite its semi-derelict state, the pagoda is used as a boarding house for sailors awaiting their next assignment. Visitors are able to look at its exterior but are discouraged from entering.

## Gobbets

- Damon de Laszlo tells me that the future of his Helter Skelter at Pelham Place is secure after East Hampshire Council finally granted planning permission on 4 February. As is always the case with retrospective applications the local council made the process as painful as they could and drew a little blood en route. It gave permission on the second application but only on condition that the crown is changed from red to a "natural colour", whatever that means. Of course red is a natural colour if you include flowers and autumn leaves on your palette, so maybe Damon simply has to choose another and more 'natural' tone of red?



Pelham Place will be open to the public again on 29 June in aid of the Army Benevolent Fund, so if you were disappointed by last year's garden party weather and want to retake your photographs in the sunshine, this should be the perfect opportunity.

- The Hunting Tower at Chatsworth was completed in 1582 for Bess of Hardwick and affords a spectacular panorama over Capability Brown's magnificent Park. Now, after an extensive restoration that ended in 2003, the folly is available as a holiday house in much the same way that others are let through the Landmark Trust. The tower itself sleeps 4 people, with space for 2 more in the adjacent outbuilding. The estate even welcomes dogs, and provides them with many long and fabulous walks through the woods and around the lakes. You even receive free entry to the House and Garden during your stay, and all proceeds help to fund the long-term preservation of Chatsworth itself. Full details are available from [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org).



- The Duke of Norfolk's propensity to upset his neighbours in Arundel seems to have reached new heights according to *West Sussex Today*. At the centre of the argument is the erection of a new oak castle in the grounds of Arundel Castle, called Oberon's Palace. Its location by the castle wall and opposite the town's cathedral has added greatly to the controversy, fuelling critical comments by more than a few local residents. One such neighbour described it as "hideous", while others used terms like "absolute eyesore" and "ridiculous".



The trustees of Arundel Castle are said to be delighted with the commission which forms part of a new garden built in memory of the Collector Earl (Thomas, 14th Earl of Arundel), who was the first great English collector of art. As such they hope it will be enjoyed by visitors and be a place of peace and inspiration to all who visit. Curiously they made no mention of people who live locally, who have already named it the 'Temple of Doom'. In a poll by the newspaper reporting the story, some 85% of voters thought the building was a monstrosity.

- You can keep up to date with more news, download back issues of the e-Bulletin and much more besides by checking regularly our website at [www.follies.org.uk](http://www.follies.org.uk).

## Forthcoming Events

**Saturday, 8 March 2008** – Guided tour of Lord Berners' folly tower and Robert Heber-Percy's folly at Faringdon, Oxfordshire, followed by the Annual General Meeting in the Corn Exchange. Full details from [woodcocki@yahoo.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto:jm.holt@virgin.net)

**Sunday, 15 June 2008** – Tour of Painshill Park, Cobham, Surrey with Iain Gray. Further information given in the leaflet posted in February or from Iain Gray at 020-8870 4567 or [gg@candycollect.co.uk](mailto:gg@candycollect.co.uk)

**Sunday, 29 June 2008** – Open Day at Pelham Place, East Tisted, Alton, Hampshire, in aid of the Army Benevolent Fund. Details available through [andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk).

**Sunday, 13 July 2008** – Tour of Derbyshire follies. Further details from Joy Cotton on 01332 705165.

## Caption Competition

Last month's caption competition showed John Ownsworth peering beneath the door of the Wemyss Family Mausoleum at Gosford House. The winner was James Ayling's offering of "*Your tummy ache isn't that bad dear!*" and wins a bottle of Brouilly, which is on its way.



Picture credits: Chandigarh Rock Garden – [www.nekchand.com](http://www.nekchand.com); Lord Berners' Tower – Neil Hanson, [www.petticoated.com/curious22.htm](http://www.petticoated.com/curious22.htm), and [www.faringdon.org](http://www.faringdon.org); Kirkby Lonsdale Gazebo – [www.visit-cumbria.com](http://www.visit-cumbria.com); Ocampo Pagoda – Sidney Snoeck; Pelham Place Helter Skelter – Mike Cousins; Chatsworth Hunting Tower – [www.chatsworth.org](http://www.chatsworth.org); Oberon's Palace – [www.westsussextoday.co.uk](http://www.westsussextoday.co.uk); Competition – Rex Critchlow.