



## Britain's Favourite Follies

Issue 31

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### Follies Journal 9

Volume 9 of the Journal was sent to subscribing members last week. It is the first of two volumes on *Follies in France*, researched and explained in the level of detail you would expect from Pieter and Rita. Their Appendix and Addenda to Journals 9 and 10 have also been posted on the Folly Fellowship's website [www.follies.org.uk](http://www.follies.org.uk).



The Rustic Folly at Domaine de Villechaise, Confolens, Charante (16)  
Photo: John and Philippa Holroyd

### Rex Critchlow RIBA

It is with enormous sadness that we report the death of our long time friend, member and architect colleague Rex Critchlow, who died on 3rd October. Our thoughts and prayers are with his wife, Jenifer, and with his family, friends and colleagues. If anyone who would like to send a letter of condolence, they can do so through Andrew Plumridge.

#### The Folly Fellowship

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



The Bridge and Pantheon at Stourhead  
Photo: Colimmel on Flickr

Which is Britain's favourite folly? It is a question we are often asked and one we try to avoid answering if we can, in part because it implies a degree of importance in the result and because it panders to the 'celebrity' obsession that plagues our lives. It is also because polls of any type rely on the people being surveyed knowing enough about the subject to reach an informed decision, which is rarely the case. And, to be fair, our resistance may also be linked to the fact that even we don't know the answer.

In 2002, the BBC set out to establish our "Greatest Briton" and published a list of candidates that was as remarkable for the people who were included as it was for those who were not. It was based on "the nation's choice" and revealed just how little some of us know about our nation and accomplishments. It also showed that people nominate candidates from the limit of their knowledge so their list was never going to be a true

representation of 'greatness', whatever that means. For example, one of the shortlisted was David Beckham, and while few would deny that his football skills are breathtaking or that his ability to send an inch-perfect pass to Ryan Giggs sprinting down the opposite side of the Old Trafford pitch provided us with moments of pure sporting genius, his achievements do not compare to those of Shakespeare, Brunel or Churchill.

David's inclusion was simply because he was a hero to people who had never heard of William Tyndale, Alan Turing or Tim Berners-Lee. The same is true of John Lennon and explains why he was eighth on the list—ahead of Lord Nelson! It also explains why Robbie Williams, Bono, Michael Crawford and Tony Blair were there at all—Blair, by the way, was 67th in the BBC poll but first in Channel 4's list of 100 Worst Britons in 2003, just ahead of Jordan! Point taken?

The BBC is obsessed by polls and has held one for almost everything you could imagine, including Britain's best view and best food festival. In May of this year, its *Countryfile* magazine added a list of Britain's favourite follies, and while the results were largely to be expected, there were a couple of surprises. The list is repeated here to see how it compares with your own.

**1**st place, and honour of being Britain's favourite folly, was awarded to **Stourhead**, Wiltshire. The quick among you will immediately point out that this is a garden rather than a folly, so should have been disqualified, but therein lies one of the problems with polls.

Built by the wealthy banker Henry Hoare, Stourhead was intended to be a reminder of his tour of Italy and reflect his fascination for the remains of Classical and Renaissance Rome. After damming the River Stour to create the lake, the landscape was shaped to create serene walks with views that were enriched by the addition of what we now call follies.



St. Peter's Pump at Stourhead, by Francis Nicholson

His first project was to build the **Grotto**, work on which started in 1740. It was lined in tufa imported from Italy, and the main chamber furnished with a reclining nymph based on the statue of Ariadne in the Vatican Gardens. It overlooks the lake and the **Temple of Flora**, built in 1744 by Henry Flitcroft.

Standing over a natural spring known as the 'Paradise Well', the Temple of Flora is based on a temple to the river god Clitumnus in Spoleto (Umbria) and carries an inscription from Sybil's speech to Aeneas as he enters the underworld, saying '*Procul, O procul este, profane*' (from Virgil's *Aeneid*) meaning 'Begone, you who

are uninitiated, begone!' It is believed to have been included to ensure that visitors entered the gardens in the right spirit, something that is just as apt today.

The **Pantheon** (see front) was also by Flitcroft and built 1753-4. Horace Walpole was particularly struck by its splendour, saying that 'Few buildings exceed the magnificence, taste and beauty of this temple', and is part of the iconic image of Stourhead. Although its walls are lined with classical statues, its interior is dominated by Rysbrack's statue of Hercules, after whom the temple was originally named.

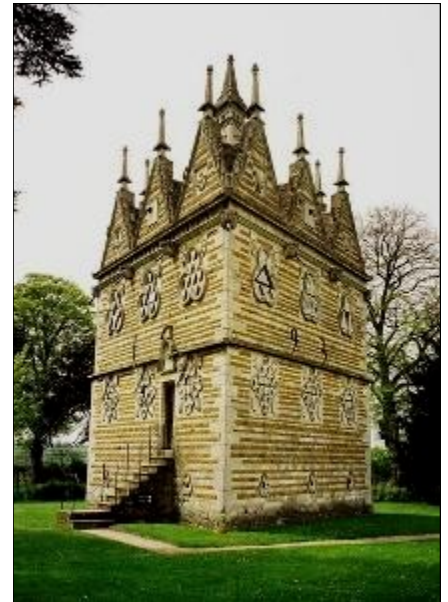
The **Bridge** was built in 1762, and modelled on one of Palladio's at Vicenza. Three years later, Flitcroft added the **Temple of Apollo**, which he based on the circular temple at Baalbeck (Syria), and created a view that Walpole rightly described as 'one of the most picturesque scenes in the world.'



The Temple of Apollo. Photo: Flash of Light on Flickr

Although the rustic cottage and convent survive in the surrounding woods, and the much forgotten St. Peter's Well still stands at the top of the valley, many of the original garden structures have been lost. These include Hoare's plan to erect a sham mosque in the garden together with his Turkish tent, hermitage, Chinese temple and Umbrello, all of which were later 'demolished by Sir Richard Coalt Hoare in order to falsify Stourhead as The Great Classical Garden' (*H+M Follies*).

**2**nd place was awarded to the **Rushton Triangular Lodge** in Northamptonshire, arguably our oldest folly. It was the brainchild of Sir Thomas Tresham who started work on the building in 1593 after his release from prison for refusing to deny the Catholic faith. Everything about the building is based on the number 3: three storeys,



three sides measuring 33 feet in length, three gargoyles per elevation and three Latin inscriptions of 33 characters in length to name but a few. Its religious significance is also reflected in each elevation representing one element of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost.

**3**rd place will be a surprise to many, and is **Roger's Folly** near Penzance, Cornwall. Built in the early years of the 19th century by John Rogers of Treassowe (1750-1832), it provided a shelter from where he could look at the sea and at St. Michael's Mount.



**4**th place was awarded to the group of follies at **Barwick Park**, near Yeovil, Somerset, the best known of which is Jack the Treacle Eater.

According to local folklore, the follies were erected in the 1820s by George Messiter to mark the four boundaries of his estate and





Jack the Treacle Eater, Barwick Park  
 Photo: Leon (Nero21) on Flickr

to relieve unemployment. There is a ring of truth about this, with the Fish Tower on the north quadrant, Jack on the east, the 75-foot-high Cone (Rose Tower) at the west, and Needle to the south. However, Barbara Jones tells us that two of the follies appear in paintings of Barwick House from the 1770s, some half a century earlier, throwing all such theories to the wind.

**5**th place was given to **Charborough Tower** at Morden, Dorset. A plaque on the tower tells that it was built by Edward Drax in 1790, during the short time that he owned the estate. A lightning strike on 29 November 1838 resulted in much of the tower being taken down and re-built the following year at a reduced height.

Even at a fraction of its former self, the tower at Charborough is an impressive and surprising addition to the list.



Charborough Park Tower  
 Photo: Ted van Onzen

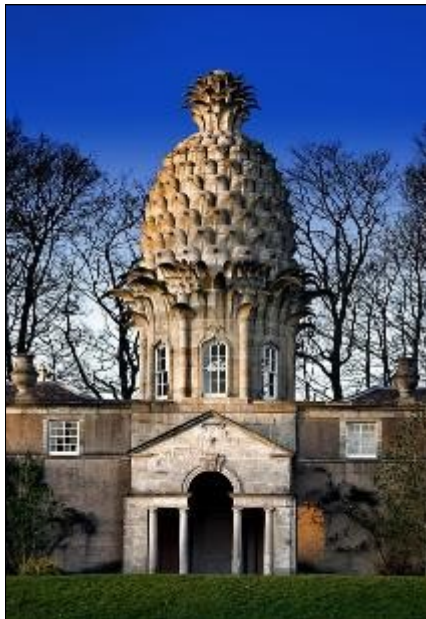
**6**th place was awarded to the six-storey **Brynkir Tower** at Dolbenmaen (Snowdonia) built by Joseph Huddart in 1821. During the 1994

restoration, builders uncovered a date stone for 1859 at third floor level suggesting that the tower was originally only half of its height but extended upwards. It now provides luxurious holiday accommodation.



Brynkir Tower. Photo: Paul White www.welshruins.co.uk)

**7**th place seemed surprisingly low for **The Dunmore Pineapple**, given that it is probably 'the most bizarre building in Scotland'. Built in 1761 by the 29-year-old John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore, the building is often attributed to Sir William Chambers because of his designs for similar buildings at Kew Gardens, but there is no evidence to support or deny this.



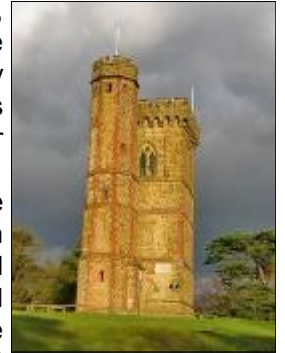
Dunmore Pineapple, Stirling  
 Photo: Simon Brown

**8**th place was awarded to **Hull's Tower** in Surrey. It was built by Richard Hull who was frustrated knowing that Leith Hill was only

965 feet above sea level. In 1765 he set out to correct this by adding his 64-foot-tall Gothic prospect tower and saying over the door that 'it was built not for not only his own pleasure, but also for the enjoyment of others.'

In the beginning the tower had just two rooms and an internal staircase. To help them enjoy the view, Hull provided a telescope so that visitors could see London to the north, the English Channel to the south, and the obligatory 13 counties on a clear day.

When he died in 1772, Hull was buried beneath the tower, but it was quickly stripped of its doors, windows and contents and fell into a ruined state. To avoid further damage the tower was filled with rubble and the entrance blocked up. When Mr Evelyn reopened it in 1864, the compacted rubble was too difficult to remove so he added the side turret and staircase to give visitors access to the roof again. The National Trust removed the last of the rubble in 1984 as part of its refurbishment.



Leith Hill Tower  
 Photo: Jimseviltwin on www.britannica.com

**9**th place was taken by **The House in the Clouds** at Thorpness (Suffolk). Built in the 1920s, it was the idea of G. Stuart Ogilvie who developed what some called 'the ideal holiday village', and others 'the Home of Peter Pan.' It originally contained water storage tanks for all of the nearby houses, but these have gone now that the area is on a mains supply. The building is now partially let as holiday accommodation.



Completing the list in 10th place was **Tollymore Forest Park** at Castlewellan in Co. Down (NI). It is, of course, another group of follies and something of a gem for folly hunters, including a barn that is disguised as a church, stone cones on gate piers and gothic-style gate arches like the Barbican Gate (below). They are believed to be the work of Thomas Wright of Durham (1711-86), who was a friend of Lord Clanbrassil, owner of Tollymore at that time. In addition, the path along the Shimna river is marked by many curiosities, including bridges, grottoes and caves.



**Britain's best ...  
Underground Attractions**

In a separate poll of Britain's best underground attractions, readers of the BBC's *Countryfile* magazine awarded top spot to the Hellfire Caves at West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, created by Sir Frances Dashwood around 1750-60 as a meeting place for his Hellfire Club. Set 90m below ground level out of sight of the eighteenth-century paparazzi, the rooms and chambers provided a stage set for the club's banquets and orgies.

Second spot was given to the



Cabinet War Rooms in London, followed by Gough's Cave at Cheddar Gorge, the Underground Passages in Exeter, and then the Duke of Portland's subterranean passages and rooms at Welbeck Abbey in North Nottinghamshire. No grottoes were included.

**Britain's best ...  
Maze**

BC viewers also agreed that the maze at Longleat (Wiltshire) was the best in Britain. It was a curious poll with only the winner being declared, so what happened to the grotto and maze at Leeds Castle in Kent, or the Statue of Liberty maze near York?



**Feedback**

Mark Bridge kindly responded to Bulletin 29 (Pyramids) and reported that "earlier this year an ancient Beech tree growing in Brightling Park was snapped off by a gale and tumbled into the churchyard, narrowly missing Fuller's pyramid but demolishing part of the great wall he had built around the estate. Happily the tree has been cut up and the wall restored, while other trees which might threaten in the future have been trimmed back."

Richard and Janie Saunders also wrote to say "I expect you're well aware of this building, but as the bulletin said, there were so few of them I thought I'd remind everyone of the pared down version of this style in Fore Street, Hertford" (see below).



Jeremy Miln let us know of a pyramid that once stood on Alderley Edge in Cheshire, saying that "it began life as a sixteenth century stone hut which contained faggots etc for a beacon, but was pyramalised in the 1770s by Lord Stanley as an eyecatcher to Alderley Park. The beacon pyramid collapsed a few years ago and I have tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade my colleagues in the National Trust to support a bid to put it back for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 since we know exactly what it looked like and it would be fun to do the Beacon again." If it helps, the bid has our support.

Unless otherwise stated, all pictures in this edition of the Bulletin are taken by the editor or from the Folly Picture Library. 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.

**Poll of Members**

*My five favourite follies are:*

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

*Please send your selection to [andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk) by no later than 31st December 2010. We will compile the results and announce them in a future edition of the Bulletin.*