




Gothick Gardens


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Warsaw Weekend

Among the events being planned for 2011 is a weekend in Warsaw visiting its English gardens and follies, including Łazienki Park, Wilanów Park and Arkadia. Full details of the trip and dates will be announced shortly.



The Sham Aquaduct at Arkadia (above) and Pagoda at Wilanów Park (below), Warsaw



The Folly Fellowship

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In his book *Gothick: Four Hundred Years of Excess, Horror, Evil and Ruin* Richard Davenport-Hines credits the reinvention of the 'Gothick' style to Alexander Pope's use of art, architecture and literature in landscape design, and in particular to the development of follies. But, while Pope and his circle made *Gothick* popular across most of Europe, its reappearance is actually due to a small group of French architects who started using it about a decade earlier—at a meeting in Paris on 21 July 1710, the Académie d'Architecture discussed the trend for putting bowed and cusped arches on chimneypieces, and *'disapproved of several of these new manners, which are defective and which belong for the most part to the Gothic'*.

Britain's thirst for 'Gothick' began in 1715 when William Townsend designed an eyecatcher for Shotover Park (below), based on Hawksmoor's North Quad at All Souls College, Oxford. It found immediate approval from critics and professionals alike, and was soon being copied by them, per-

haps explaining why the folly has been attributed to so many architects over the years.

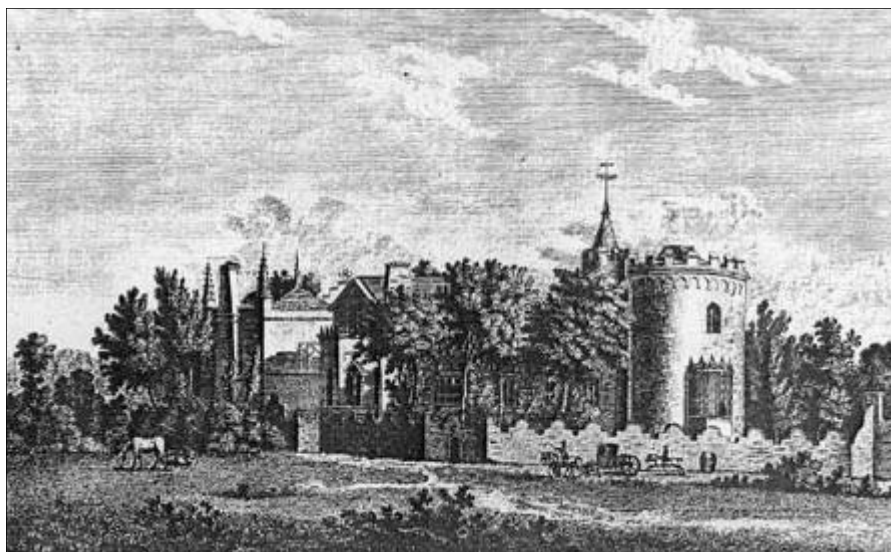
Until this point in time the term 'Gothic' had been associated with the Goths—an aggressive 1st century tribe from Germania—and with ecclesiastical architecture from the Dark Ages. In the 18th century, however, it adopted a broader meaning for anything medieval or which preceded the mid-17th century. It also acquired a 'k' from some writers, something that has been continued as a way of distinguishing between the two.

This change of emphasis was important because it gave Gothic architecture a chance to refresh its reputation, especially when Pope spoke of it having 'vigour...[and]...a sense of grandeur that was sorely needed in English culture. Furthermore, these writers began to argue that there were whole areas of English cultural history which had been ignored in conventional reconstructions of the past, and that the way to breathe life into the culture was by re-establishing relations with the forgotten, *Gothic history*' (Punter and Byron's, *The Gothic*).



It also gave architects an opportunity to break free from the shackles of classicism, which they regarded as simple, ordered and too heavily controlled by a set of rules. In comparison, Gothick gave back a freedom to add ornament to buildings, and to embody the excess and exaggeration of the time.

One of the leading exponents of this new style was Horace Walpole, who in 1748 began building a house at Strawberry Hill, close to Pope's home near Twickenham. With his friends John Chute and Richard Bentley, Walpole's self-appointed 'Committee of Taste' created 'the first house without any existing medieval fabric to be built from scratch in the Gothic style and the first to be based on actual historic examples, rather than an extrapolation of the Gothic vocabulary first developed by William Kent' ([Rosemary Hill's Welcome to Strawberry Hill](#)). It was a revelation in its day, causing Lord Bath to write:



Walpole's Strawberry Hill House—
contemporary engraving

*Some talk of Gunnersbury,
For Sion some declare;
And some say, that with Chiswick House
No villa can compare;
But all the beaux of Middlesex,
Who know the country well,
Say, that Strawberry Hill, that Strawberry
Doth bear away the bell.*

*Though Surry boasts its Oatlands,
And Claremont kept so grim
And though they talk of Southcote's
'tis but a dainty whim;
For ask the gallant Bristow,
Who does in taste excel
If Strawberry Hill, if Strawberry
Don't bear away the bell.*

Not wanting to be excluded, landscape gardeners embraced the style and introduced Gothick follies to most of the major parks and gardens of the time. Among them were Alfred's Hall at Cirencester Park (Glos), built in 1733,

Sanderson Miller's ruined castle at Hagley (Worcs) in 1747, and the Shobden Arches (Heref) erected in 1752 with stone taken from a Norman church that Lord Bateman had demolished shortly before. More than ever before, however, these landscape designers made a conscious attempt to control the location and setting of their follies, often creating a stage set that was dark, mysterious and threatening: only later did the concept of 'spooky' enter the vocabulary or any association with witches, vampires or the forces of evil. These settings were inspired by the paintings of Claude Lorrain and

Salvator Rosa, many of which showed dark and moody scenes centred on a classical ruin lit by a shaft of sunlight.

Gothick gardens, then, are more than landscapes ornamented with follies, even Gothick ones: they are instead a combination of architecture, topography and atmosphere, with the best of them creating a sense of danger and unease in the person who is experiencing it. This is often why they are best seen at dusk or in an early morning mist, and preferably alone.

On his website www.theweepingcross.com, James Rattue lists ten 'Gothic' Gardens, the earliest of which is **Radway Grange**, near Banbury. It was the birthplace of Sanderson Miller in 1716, and where he experimented with the Gothick style, firstly by Gothicking the house and later by adding a sham castle on raised ground overlooking the site of the Battle of



The Castle at Radway, Oxfordshire
Picture: Chorsey on www.panoramio.com

Edgehill. The website correctly points out that Radway was where 'you could see the first sparks of the Gothic imagination's creative engagement with the melancholy potential of the British countryside'.

Of the ten that are listed, **Banwell Caves** stands out as the best in terms of ambience and the quality of its follies. It evolved from the discovery in 1757 of a cave lined with stalactites. By 1824 the land had been acquired by Henry Law, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who agreed to re-open the cave and donate the admission money to a local school. It proved to be such a success that in 1825 work began on a second and lower tunnel, but instead of finding an easier route into the stalactite cave, workers found a second chamber containing a number of bones, some of which were prehistoric and others unidentifiable.

As an amateur palaeontologist, Bishop Law saw this as a chance to pursue his interest more closely and added a small *cottage orné* as a place for him to stay. It also gave him an opportunity to publicly challenge Charles Darwin, whose

Ten Gothick Gardens

- *Banwell Caves, Somerset*
- *Belsay Hall, Northumberland*
- *Busbridge Lakes, Surrey*
- *Downton Hall, Shropshire*
- *Hackfall, North Yorkshire*
- *Hafod, Ceredigion*
- *Hawkestone Park, Shropshire*
- *Piercefield, Monmouthshire*
- *Radway Grange, Oxfordshire*
- *Tong, Shropshire*

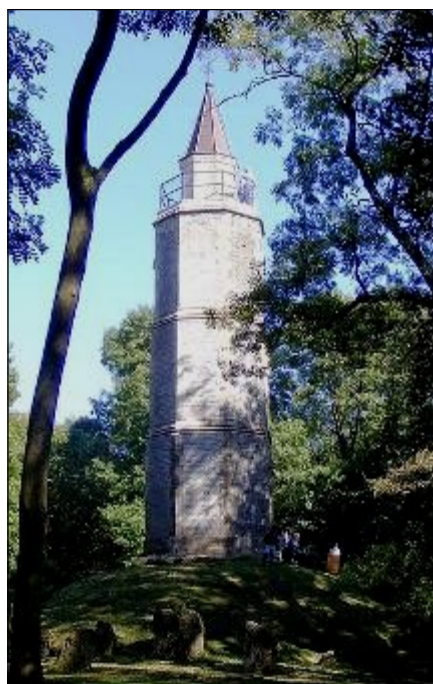


The Cottage Orné and follies at Banwell, c. 1830. Picture from www.banwellcaves.org

theory of evolution was undermining Church doctrine; believing that the bones must have been deposited during the Great Flood, and thus prove the story of Noah's Ark, Bishop Law encouraged people to visit Banwell and inspect the finds, which they did in their thousands until he died in 1865.

As part of his improvement of the site, Bishop Law built a garden 'on the damp north side, with the moss and the slugs' (H+M *Follies*, p.431). He also enlarged the cottage and added a small number of grottoes and follies, including a Druid's Temple, a pebble summerhouse, an Osteoicon (bone repository) and a Tower that was completed in 1840, and recently re-

The Tower at Banwell. Picture: RODW on www.wikipedia.org



stored by the present owners.

In Surrey, **Busbridge Hall** was little more than a timber-framed house in a woodland setting until Philip Webb bought it in 1748 and saw its landscape potential. The sandstone in that area around Godalming was perfect for cutting dramatic walks and valleys, and meant that Webb could utilise the chambers that appeared naturally from water erosion, turning some of them into grottoes. It was a process that Henry Hare Townsend continued in the nineteenth-century, leaving a landscape that also boasts a rustic bridge, an ice-house, boathouse, Doric temple, statue of Hercules and a Ghost Walk.

Belsay Hall was based on Sir Charles Middleton's interest in Greek temples, and designed by John Dobson in the Greco-Doric style. Capability Brown introduced a Gothick eyecatcher there in the late 1700s, but the only thing resembling a folly today is Lake Cottage on the edge of the estate. Its Gothick gardens are set within an old quarry in a corner of the Park.

When Richard Payne Knight inherited **Downton Castle** in 1772, his first goal was to remodel the house to an impressive Gothick castle (right). In doing so he was able to demonstrate some of the ideology that later appeared in his



Lake Cottage at Belsay Hall Photo: www.northumbria-byways.com

book *Analytical Enquiry into the Principles of Taste* (1805) arguing the need to include 'improvements from different ages in the same building' and a link between the design of architecture and landscape. He laid out the grounds as a series of walks that lead down to the River Teme deep in the gorge below, taking visitors over a series of dramatic bridges, past a rock hermitage and ending at the sham ruins of what he called the Roman Bath. Knight is said to have often spent up to 10 hours a day reading in his library, which he put in a handsome tower beside his castle.

The garden at **Hafod** is about 12 miles outside of Aberystwyth, and generally thought to be in the Picturesque instead of the Gothick



style, even though it has a Gothick house. It was laid out by Thomas Johnes with two walks—a modestly difficult one for ladies and a strenuous one for gentlemen. Both were aimed at showing off the beauty of the site, which has some similarities with **Hackfall**, but without the sense of danger or impressive range of follies. Nonetheless, it still boasts an alpine and a chain bridge, and an obelisk from 1805, known as the Bedford Monument.

Like Hafod, there is an alpine bridge at **Hawkstone Park**, alongside a long list of excellent follies. Also like Hafod, it is widely held to be a Picturesque landscape, but these things are always in the eye of the beholder. **Piercefield**, near Chepstow, has some similarities to Hawkstone, especially its narrow, cliff-hugging footpaths winding their way around deep ravines. Even though Valentine Morris employed Sir John Soane to remodel the house, the grounds remain largely devoid of follies, although there is a small grotto, a Druid's Temple, Cold Bath and a pair of fast decaying pavilions flanking the mansion.



One of Soane's pavilions at Piercefield
Photo: Erika Grima Hawkins (Flickr)

Hackfall, at Grewelthorpe, had a natural Gothick character thanks to the fast flowing River Ure cutting a deep gorge in the wooded hills and leaving a site that simply begged for follies. William Aislabie obliged in 1750, adding some of

the best in England, including a Banqueting House that may have been designed by Robert Adam; if not, it was certainly inspired by his 'Design for a Capriccio of a Roman Ruin' painted c.1754 and originally intended for Kedleston Hall (Derbys). Aislabie also added a seat in the style of William Kent (whom he greatly admired), a Rustic Temple, Fisher's Hall, a grotto and much more. Unusually for a Gothick garden, and reinforcing a view that it too was part of the Picturesque style, many of the follies are visible from one another.

Hackfall 'became a Yorkshire showcase for the next century and a half; even in the early 20th century charabancs from Harrogate arrived at the entrance, where tourists paid a small fee and proceeded on foot, stopping to take tea in the Græco-Roman ruin at Mowbray Point' (*H+M Follies*, p.578). It later fell into ruin but has been rescued in the nick of time by the Woodland and Landmark Trusts. To see it restored is a joy: to have seen it in a state of dignified decay was magical!



Mowbray Point at Hackfall
Photo: Paul Brooker on www.geograph.org.uk

Lastly, James Rattue says that **Tong** 'only really qualifies because it represents a mad melancholy too extreme to be missed out.' It does, of course, take more than this to create a Gothick garden, but it is churlish to argue the point.

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Books: *A Place of Secrets*

By Rachel Hore

Simon and Schuster (August 2010)

We rarely look at the works of fiction, but it is surprising just how often they include mention of follies. One such example is



Rachel Hore's book *A place of Secrets*, which tells the story of Jude Gower, a London auctioneer who recently lost her husband, and who finds herself sent to Wickham Hall in Norfolk to value a collection of 18th-century astronomical instruments and manuscripts. By chance, her great-grandfather was gamekeeper on the estate between the two wars, so she stops en route to find out more from her grandmother and learns of a mystery involving a folly on the estate, and someone referred to only as 'the wild girl'.

Welcomed at the Hall by the elderly Chantal Wickham, Jude learns that the collection is being sold to pay death duties following the recent death of Chantal's husband; he had already sold farmland attached to the Hall, as well as the woodland in which the folly stands, and which a developer plans to demolish.

As Jude catalogues the collection she builds up a picture of Anthony Wickham, the lonely amateur astronomer who owned the Hall in the late eighteenth century, and his daughter Esther. She discovers that the folly was built as an observatory, and that it was there that Anthony and Esther made their important discoveries. It is also there that Jude meets Euan, a local nature writer, and as she uncovers the tragic story of Anthony and Esther, so Euan reveals to her the healing powers of nature and the stars, allowing Jude to leave behind the tragedy in her own life, and to love again.

Please remember to let us have your list of top five follies. At the moment, the leading contenders are Horton Tower (Dorset), Rushden Triangular Lodge (Northants) and the Temple at Shotover (Oxon), but there are plenty more to choose from. Send your list to andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk.

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