Foll-

The e-Bulletin of The Folly Fellowship

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Issue 35:
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Events calendar:

- ***06 March—Annual General Meeting*** *starting at 2.30pm at East Haddon Village Hall, Northamptonshire—see F/F website www.follies.org.uk Pre-visit to Haddonstone Show Garden, East Haddon*
- ***9 March—Illustrated Lecture and Reception*** *by the Georgian Society of Jamaica, looking at Jamaica's historic buildings. Tickets = £15 each. Information from Felicia Pheasant, Holdfast House, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 2EU (enclose SAE) or felicia.pheasant@btinternet.com*
- ***18-19 March—Welsh Weekend*** *with visits to Paxton's Tower, the Cilwendeg Shell House, and the gardens and grotto at Dolfor. Details from pgodfrey@gmail.com*

29 March—Birkbeck Garden History Society Annual Lecture *by Andrew Plumridge on Follies. Tickets = £10 each. Starts at 6.30pm at the Art Worker's Guild, 6 Queen Square, Bloomsbury, London WC1N. Details from ruth.brownlow@gmail.com*

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.

The Dunmore Pineapple *Photo:* The Landmark Trust

Pineapple Follies

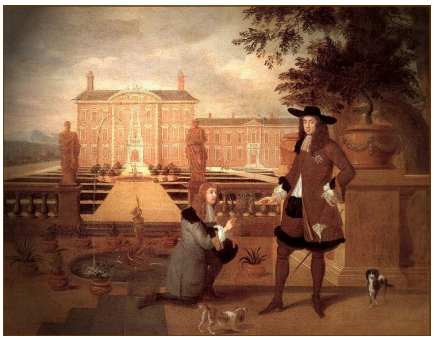
In 1640, long before they had arrived in Britain, John Parkinson (Royal Botanist to Charles I) described a fruit in the *Theatrum Botanicum* that was 'Scaly like an Artichoke... but more like to a cone of the Pine tree', and went on to name it a *'Pineapple'* because it was 'so sweete in smell...tasting as if Wine, Rosewater and Sugar were mixed together.'

His entry suggested that the pineapple was a recent discovery, but it had actually been known in some parts of Europe for almost 150 years by then. It was discovered by Christopher Columbus who is said to have found it on the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe during his second voyage to the New World in 1493. There he noted a strange fruit that was

juicy, sweet and capable of staying fresh at sea for much longer than most others.

When he returned home with a shipment of what Columbus called the *piña de Indes* (Pine of the Indians), it caused a sensation. Its rarity, however, made it expensive so something that could only be enjoyed by the rich and influential, often appearing at the most important banquets and celebrations of the period.

In an attempt to capitalise on its high value, and to satisfy the demand for them, Europe's gardeners did all they could to grow pineapples on home soil. It took nearly two centuries before they finally achieved this, mainly through the development of the 'hothouse method' of horticulture. So significant was this achievement that in 1675, Charles II was happy to be painted by Hendrik Danckerts (below) receiving one of the first English-grown pineapples from his head gardener, John Rose.



George Washington first tasted the pineapple in Barbados in 1751 and immediately named it his favourite tropical fruit. A little later, in 1770, Captain James Cook took the fruit with him and introduced it to Hawaii, but it was not cultivated commercially there until the 1880s when transporting the fruit became easier.

Those who could afford pineapples made a point of displaying the fact by having them carved on gateposts, weathervanes, door frames and even atop newel posts on staircases, where many are still put today. The demand was so great that in Georgian times any hostess who could not afford to buy a pineapple for her dinner table simply rented one for a guinea a night (the equivalent of £5,000), but had to pay a fine of two guineas more if it was cut or eaten.

As part of the hysteria surrounding the fruit, homeowners had pineapples sewn onto table napkins, into curtains and even stencilled onto walls. It encouraged Josiah Wedgewood to produce a range of pineapple pottery and earthenware in the 1760s for use at the dinner table.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the pineapple had become a symbol of wealth and of generous hospitality. It maintained its high status until the end of the Victorian era when tinned pineapples began to arrive on steam ships from the Caribbean and the fruit became available to the masses.

The Dunmore Pineapple

Photo: Giannandrea on Wikipedia

In architectural terms, the pine-apple as a decorative motif reached its peak with the building of the stone folly at Dunmore Park (Stirlingshire). At 16m in height, it stands above an earlier, single-storey garden pavilion that is said to have been completed in 1754 by the 4th Earl as part of the large walled garden.

Curiously, the keystone over the entrance door has the date 1761 carved on it, and a further carved heart and inscription FIDELIS IN ADVERSIS was added in 1803 to commemorate the marriage of the 5th Earl to the daughter of the Duke of Hamilton.

The popular story is that the roof was added in 1777 when the 4th Earl returned home after serving as Governor to New York and Virginia. Tradition has it that wealthy New York merchants would put pineapples on the gate posts of their houses to announce that they were home and available to meet with friends. The Earl, who was said to be fond of a joke, clearly took this one step further.

Even in the 1770s, pineapples were nothing new in Scotland, having been cultivated there for almost 30 years by then. It is likely that their cultivation had been especially successful on the Dunmore estate, but it is difficult to tell because the estate papers for that period are missing.

Equally intriguing is that the name of the architect is unknown. Some have attributed it to Sir William Chambers, but we know from his papers that he was working in London at the time and the folly is not mentioned in his writings, as might be expected if it was his.

In 1973 the Landmark Trust took out a long lease on the building and set about restoring it: photographs in Barbara Jones's book *Follies and Grottoes* (Constable, 1974) show how dilapidated it had become. Today it can be rented as a holiday home, albeit said to have a 2-year waiting list.

Other Pineapple Follies

The Norfolk village of Holt owes much to the fact that 'On May-day, 1708, a great part of the town was destroyed by a dreadful fire, so fierce *that the butcher's could not save...the meat on their stalls'* (A General History of the County of Norfolk, 1829, vol.2). What emerged from the ashes was a new Georgian village that is now much admired.

At the centre of the village is an unusual obelisk that is topped with a stone pineapple. It was originally one of a pair of gate piers forming the entrance to Melton Constable Park. Both were adapted in 1757, with one given to Holt and the other taken to Dereham.

At the start of World War II, in an attempt to confuse the enemy, the town of Dereham dismantled their obelisk and put the stones down a well; they are still there. In contrast, the people of Holt simply whitewashed theirs.

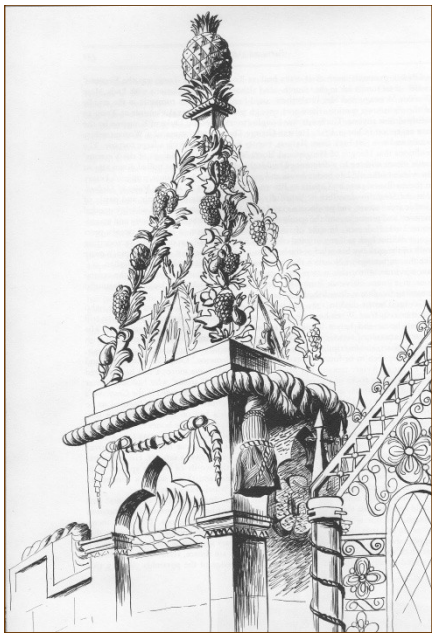
The Holt Obelisk, Norfolk
Photo: Mark Oakden on www.tournorfolk.co.uk

Standing on an isolated spot above the parish of Grafton, on the north Wiltshire Downs, is a short brick tower topped with a domed roof. Some of the headers in the dome are expressed and it has a crenellated top that combine to give the building the appearance of a pineapple.

The building is actually a pump house to an underground reservoir and was built in 1899 by William Corbin Finch, the then Lord of the Manor. His gift was significant in that Wexcombe was one of the first villages to have its own private water supply. A simple dedication stone above the door to the tower is carved in Gothic majuscules and reads:

WEXCOMBE WATERWORKS
THE GIFT OF WILLIAM CORBIN FINCH
AD 1899

Lastly, Convent Lodge at Tong (Shropshire) has a pair of gate piers that Barbara Jones included in her book *Follies and Grottoes* (Constable, 1974, pp.126-7) because they were 'too crazy and too curious to leave out.' Standing about 2m high, the square piers are topped with pyramids on which climb swags of 'fruit and leaves and flowers, artichokes and grapes, all joining at the top in a cluster of pointed leaves on which sits a pineapple.'



The Gatepiers at Convent Lodge, Tong
Drawing: Barbara Jones, *Follies and Grottoes*
The Wexcombe Pineapple
Photo: Brian Robert Marshall on Geograph

Miniature Edwardian Follies

The Edwardians are not remembered for building large numbers of follies, largely because their opportunities were decimated by the depression and the Great War. They nonetheless appreciated the beauty of plants and had a love of displaying them at their best.

One of those ways was on display stands, some of which were shaped like miniature follies. They allowed prized horticultural specimens to be shown off to great effect in winter gardens, conservatories and sitting rooms.

In 2009, one of these stands appeared in a New York sale room and was sold for an undisclosed sum. Carved in wood in 1910, the Gothick fancy stood 1.500m high and on a 0.750m diameter base. Its appearance has triggered a revival of interest in this largely forgotten art form.

Also sold in 2009 was an obelisk-shaped bird cage that was designed by Frederick Weinberg in the 1950s, and sold through the Metro Interiors Gallery in Washington (DC) for $1,800.

Foshay's Obelisk in Minneapolis

When he was a teenager, Wilbur Foshay (1881-1959) was taken to Washington to see the sights, including the monument to his hero, George Washington. So impressed was he by the 170-metre tall obelisk, that he vowed to build one as his office if ever he had enough money.

During the 1920s, he began a successful business buying utility companies and selling stock in his own, allowing him to quickly turn an initial $6,000 loan into a vast profit. By 1927, those profits were large enough to fulfil his dream, so Foshay commissioned Magney and Tusler (architects) to design for him the first skyscraper in the Mid-West. At a little over 136m in height, their plan was for a steel and reinforced concrete frame building that was clad in limestone from Indiana. It cost $3.7 million to build and included a luxurious office and apartment for Foshay on the 27th and 28th floors.

To mark its opening in August 1929, Foshay spent $116,000 on a lavish three-day party, paying for senior politicians to attend and giving them each a gold watch to mark the occasion. Half-naked girls danced in attendance, and a special March was commissioned from the great John Philip Sousa at a cost of $20,000. Two months later, when Wall Street crashed and Foshay's cheque to Sousa bounced, it revealed how his company was propped up by paper profits, and he went bust. He lost everything, including the tower, and was later sent to jail for mail fraud.

Fortunately for Foshay he made enough influential friends to see that he wasn't in jail for long. Among them was Franklin D. Roosevelt who commuted the sentence from 15 to 5 years, and Harry S. Truman who pardoned him altogether in 1947. After that Foshay moved to Salida (CO) where he did much for the community and wildlife conservation, but stopped building follies.

A group of Minneapolis residents recently raised the money to pay Sousa, so the March could be performed again. As for the tower, it is now a 5-star hotel; the Art Deco lobby has been refurbished and Foshay's office has become a bar. A museum has also been added at the top alongside a viewing platform. It was listed as a National Monument in 1977.

Malcolm Tempest

Foshay Tower on 821 Marquette Ave, Minneapolis. *Photo:* Bobak Ha'Eri on Wikipedia

Is it a folly?

Over the past few months I have received a number of e-mails asking whether the tiny thatched building at the junction of the A435 and A436 near Coberley (Glos) is a folly?

According to Cotswold District Council and a gentleman on his way to the nearby Hungry Horse Inn, it is actually a tollbooth that used to serve the Crickley Hill to Frogg Mill Turnpike in the 19th century. It has recently been restored and given a new thatched roof.

Can you help?

Andy Hebden's photo album on *Flickr* includes a picture (below) of a single-storey tower that he saw in Balham. He would like to know more about it, and in particular whether it is a folly?

If you know the building or anything about its history, please let us know at the usual address (andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk) so we can pass it on. Thank you.

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