



Tottenham House (rear), Photo: Murky1 on Wikimedia



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Events calendar:

- **29 June—Windsor Great Park:** A chance to visit some of the restricted areas at Frogmore that are not normally open to the public, including a grotto and ruined dairy. Details from ptodd@ptcs.eu
- **4 August—Boughton Park, Northampton:** A guided tour of the evocative Gothic landscape and its follies. Details from simon6964@talktalk.net
- **22-23 September—Sintra Gardens (Lisbon, Portugal):** A visit to three extraordinary gardens and their follies. Details from pfgodfrey@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.

Savernake Follies

There are very few places in Britain where it is still possible to get completely lost and to wander for hours without seeing another person. One of them is the Savernake Forest covering an area of about 4,500 acres to the south-east of Marlborough (Wilts).

Savernake was a Royal Forest long before it was recorded in the Domesday Book. At that time it was administered by wardens who were appointed by the Crown, and in 1427 that responsibility was bestowed on the Seymours. After first meeting her at Littlecote Manor, it was in the forest that King Henry VIII courted Jane Seymour in 1536.

By 1720 the estate had passed to Charles Bruce, later Earl of Ailesbury, who created much of the park that we see today. By that time its first mansion house (built by Jane's Cousin Edward, 1st Earl of Hertford) lay in ruins following a fire in 1712, so Bruce asked his brother-in-law Richard Boyle, Earl Burlington, to design a new one on the site of Tottenham Lodge, close to the site of the old house.

Burlington's plan (bottom left) was for a Palladian villa with corner towers that were accentuated by pyramidal roofs, reminiscent of a shorter version of Inigo Jones's scheme for Wilton House finished more than half a century before. At

Savernake, work began in 1721 under the direction of Henry Flitcroft, Burlington's assistant at the time, but the house didn't work well so it was altered in the 1730s and extensively remodelled by Thomas Cundy in 1823-6, five years after he had



added the stables.

Much of the forest had been emparked by the seventeenth century, but in 1763 Thomas Bruce (Charles's nephew) asked Capability Brown to improve it. Over the next ten years he reshaped the park and planted the Grand Avenue, which at 3.9 mile (6.3km) in length is still the longest tree-lined avenue in Britain.

The terrace to the south of the house is now a formal garden but in Burlington's time it formed part of the Great Walk. Only part of that walk is still visible today and it ends at a reservoir 700 metres south-west of the house, where Burlington built his **Banqueting House** in 1743. Disappointingly, the building was later demolished by Cundy in 1824.

South-east of the Banqueting House is the Truffle Walk, and to the west of that Tottenham Copse and the Octagonal Pavilion Ride, which lead to a circular lawn. At its centre is an **Octagonal Summerhouse** also by Burlington. Today it is used as a feed store for cattle, and there appears to be some substance to claims that it served as a game store for a while.

The north edge of Tottenham Copse forms the line of King Harry's Walk, where **King Harry's Summerhouse** once stood about 150 metres south of the mansion. Little is known of the folly except



Photo: Brian Robert Marshall on Geograph

that it was again by Burlington and another casualty of Cundy's park improvements.

In 1781 Thomas Bruce erected the Ionic **Ailesbury Column** at the junction of Column Ride and Three Oak Hill Drive, to the west of the house. It is believed to have stood originally at Brandenburg House in Hammersmith in 1760 before being sold to Thomas and rededicated to his uncle. The authors of *H+M Follies* found that dedication sycophantic and irritating, putting Uncle before King, and both before God, which may be a little harsh because it remains an honest and very public thank you for all that Thomas inherited.

An inscription on the reverse side marks King George III's recovery from ill health in 1789, but according to the *English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens* it was added in honour of the King's visit to Tottenham House during that year.

The future of the estate and forest is uncertain. A scheme by the Buena Vista Hospitality Group has been granted planning permission and, if implemented, would see Tottenham House converted to a luxury holiday resort and part of the park remodelled as a golf course. In the meantime, it looks

like the present owner (Lord Cardigan) is determined to repeat the folly of his ancestor but this time by charging at his trustees in the High Court instead of the Russian Army at Balaclava. The national newspapers are full of stories of him suing his trustees over the sale of a few pictures, and the trustees doing likewise to Lord Cardigan over the sale of some silverware. It all means that money which should be spent restoring the house is instead being wasted on lawyers and court fees.

The situation is summed up by the headline that accompanied an article in the Daily Telegraph last August where the Earl reportedly told journalists "I am not down and out; I'm just down to my last stately home!"



The Ailesbury Column. Photo: Angus Kirk on Flickr



Photo: Brian Robert Marshall on Geograph

Forest Hill Lodge

Like many estates Tottenham Park had gate lodges guarding its many entry points. Most are simple cottages but an exception stands at the Forest Hill entrance in the north-west corner of the park, next to what is now the busy A4 Bath Road.

The list description tells us that **Forest Hill Lodge** was built in the early nineteenth century as part of Thomas Cundy's improvements of the estate. H+M *Follies*, however, correctly points out that it owes much to Batty Langley's design for a Gothick Portico shown in his book *Ancient Architecture Restored and Improved* (1741), reinforcing the view that the lodge is at least half a century earlier.

The lodge is recognisable from the Bath Road by its quatrefoil windows at first floor level and spiked parapet where every fourth lobe terminates in an acanthus capital and twisted spike. Its walls were originally built with red-coloured rubble stone but these have been rendered to keep the

building dry. The chimney has been shortened and simplified but otherwise the lodge remains as it appeared when Francis Frith first photographed it in 1906

During its time the building has served as both a gate lodge and a tollbooth.



Above: The Lodge as it appears today. Photo: Alan Rosevear on Flickr.

Below: The Lodge as it appeared in 1906. Photo: Francis Frith



The Seymour Grotto



Photo: Dr Duncan Pepper on Geograph

At the same time that Lord Burlington was building the new mansion in Savernake Forest, Frances, Countess of Hertford was remodelling her garden at what is now Marlborough College. One of the features of her garden was an ancient barrow that formed part of Marlborough Castle in the twelfth century, and beneath which the bones of Merlin are said to be buried according to Arthurian legend.

At some point around 1725-35, Frances Hertford built a footpath that wound around the mound to form a Snail Mount, a feature that was extremely popular in gardens of the time. She

also dug into its face to create a shell-lined grotto that has recently been expertly restored by Diana Reynell. In a reference to Pope's grotto in Middlesex, Lady Hertford wrote a letter in June 1739 boasting that 'The grotto that we have made under the mount...is much prettier than that at Twickenham.'

The grotto was used as a focal point in her entertaining, often as a place to hear readings during the summer by her 'poet in residence'. A small group of her close friends also met there between 1725 and 1740, referring to themselves as Arcadian shepherdesses worshipping at the shrine of the muse of poetry.

One of the poets was James Thomson, who went on to write the words for *Rule Britannia*, and whom Lady Hertford first invited to Marlborough in 1727. It was while he was there that he composed part of his *Spring* poem, later dedicating it to Lady Hertford when it was published in 1728.

The Three Shires Stone

On the other side of the county from Savernake is the town of Colerne, which local people pronounce with a 'cull' in honour of the way that it is written in the Domesday Book. To the south of its airfield, between Road Hill and Steway Lane (on the west side of the Roman Road) is the historic meeting point of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Somerset.

In 1736, the landowners on each side of the boundary decided to mark the spot by each placing a stone carved with the date and the initial of their county. The result was a small and rather meagre affair, which a letter in the Bath

Chronicle on 17 November 1858 said '*consisted of three Stones of the dimensions ordinarily used for mere stones in Common field lands; and they were in such a position that travellers could not possibly be attracted by them; and that even those who knew of their existence, could not at once discover them.*'

To make it more prominent, a Cromlech was erected over the site in February 1859, at a cost of £34.5.8d including 'dinner to the workmen.' The event was reported in the local newspaper especially after three skeletons and a James II coin were found in the hole that



Photo: Dave Vaughan on Geograph

was dug for the Gloucestershire stone. Since then many people have assumed this to be an ancient burial mound instead of the Victorian folly that it is.

The King's Stane at Kingston Deverill

Wiltshire's other megalith mystery is at Kingston Deverill, where two sarsen stones are historically said to be the gathering point for King Alfred's army before the battle of Ethandun in 878. In fact the actual meeting place has been the subject of debate and dispute for centuries with three candidates vying for the honour.

Eleven hundred years after the event there is little clear evidence to support any of the claims, but the front runner is a site close to King Alfred's Tower at Stourhead, built by Henry Flitcroft in 1765. Local folklore also favours the site of Egbert's Stone at Maiden Bradley, especially since it stands on the banks of the river Stour at the border of Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset, but any place where three roads or boundaries meet has important symbolism in folklore.

In her book *Follies & Grottoes* (p.408), Barbara Jones suggested a third option—the kissing stones

at Kingston Deverill. The *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* of 1877 records that the stones were "brought by a farmer from King's Court Hill, where Egbert is traditionally said to have held court...", so while they may be the actual stones they are not on the historic spot.

So are the kissing stones folly? The fact that H+M *Follies* fails to mention them has to be significant and supports the general view that the stones are an act of folly, but not follies in themselves.



Photo: John Potts on Geograph

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