



Issue 44: July 2012

Events calendar:

- **1 July—Annual General Meeting** at Alvechurch Village Hall, Worcestershire, followed by tea and a talk on recent folly discoveries in Poland by Andrew Plumridge. Details from folly-waters@onetel.com
- **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 chance to visit this extraordinary garden and its follies. Details from pfgod-frey@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.

Model Villages

Madurodam. Photo: Earth Walker on Google Earth



The term *Model Village* can have at least three meanings. It can refer to the idealised communities (Bourneville and Port Sunlight) created by philanthropic industrialists; it can describe picturesque villages built by Georgian landowners; or in this case, it can refer to a genre that should perhaps more properly be known as *miniature villages*.

There is a view that miniature villages are sculpture rather than architecture, so cannot be classified as follies. If that is so, why is it that Mark Bourne's *Little Italy*—a collection of miniature Italian buildings at Corris (Wales)—qualifies for inclusion when the commercial parks do not? It is part of the wider *Legoland question* and the answer seems to depend on where an individual draws the boundary between art and architecture.

Art historian and folly expert Rita Boogaart is of the opinion that these Lilliputian Kingdoms are follies or at least half-follies and she introduces us to a few of them here. (AP)

Madurodam (Netherlands)

Madurodam, the smallest town in the Netherlands, was frequently in the press last winter ahead of its sixtieth anniversary. To mark the event it was renovated and made interactive, which these days seems to require information being sent to your mobile phone instead of being read from boards! The transformation made the visitor experience glorious again and was completed in time for its official re-opening by Queen Beatrix on 21 April 2012.

Madurodam is a miniature town in Scheveningen, close to The Hague. It has models of Dutch buildings and landmarks, including its best known historical monuments and modern structures, all reproduced at a scale of 1:25. Since it opened in 1952 more than 50 million people have passed

through its gates, but few of them will have known that the park was established as a war memorial as well as a charitable foundation.

The main motivator behind the park was Mrs Boon-van der Starp, who wanted to provide long-term financial support to the Dutch Student Sanatorium in Laren, founded in 1947. Having heard about the miniature village in Beaconsfield, and how its revenues were high enough to allow its owner to give large annual donations to hospitals across London, she decided to create something similar in The Netherlands.

As Mrs Boon's idea crystallized so did the realisation that she needed a lot of capital to build its exhibits. It was about that time that she met Mr and Mrs Maduro, who wanted to form a lasting memorial to their son George.

The Maduros were a Jewish couple from Willemstad on the Caribbean island of Curaçao. Before the war their son was a law student in Leiden but had stayed on to fight with the Dutch Resistance. He was eventually captured and died of typhus at Dachau Concentration Camp in 1945, and posthumously awarded Holland's highest military order. Having met Mrs Boon when they collected the medal, the Maduros agreed to donate a sum of money to her project on condition that it was named *Madurodam* in commemoration of their son.

The architect S. J. Bouma was commissioned to design the park and visited Bekonscot in pursuit of ideas. Back at The Hague, the city authorities granted a long lease on the site, while local companies sponsored individual items and

many communities and individuals gave time to organise and build the project. On 2 July 1952, it was opened by the then Princess Beatrix who was appointed Mayor of Madurodam, a position she held until she succeeded to the Dutch throne.

The design of Madurodam has not been changed since 1952, but it was expanded in 1996. It still donates all of its profits to Dutch charities, originally to the Laren Sanatorium, and after that closed in 1964, to other non-profit making groups who help and encourage young people. It has special open days when the blind can touch its exhibits and learn about aspects of architecture that are otherwise unfathomable to them, including size and scale. For sighted people of all ages it is enough to be Gulliver for a day.



Bekonscot claims to be the oldest model village in the world. That alone was not enough to earn it a mention in *H+M Follies* but Barbara Jones did include it in *Follies & Grottoes* without saying why it should have folly status.

In 1927, the London accountant Roland Callingham built a pool at his home Beaconsfield and held swimming and tennis parties there for most of London's high society. He was a model railway enthusiast and had built one that occupied a

large part of his Bekonscot home, the name of which derives from an amalgam of Beaconsfield and his former hometown of Ascot. In 1928, Mrs Callingham gave an ultimatum that either the toy went or she did, forcing Roland to move his railway outdoors.

The move provided a perfect opportunity for the network to upgrade to a Gauge 1 system, which Roland commissioned from the famous model railway firm Bassett-Lowke, together with instructions

to create the largest layout in Britain. Together with his head gardener Tom Berry, he built model houses to complement the layout as well as two islands and a pier for his pool. Encouraged by friends and staff, he then planned a rural landscape assisted by a team of volunteers and local schoolboys. Local buildings and personal favourites of the staff provided much of the inspiration.

Throughout this period the summer parties continued. When it grew too dark to play tennis, guests would wander over to play trains instead and look at the illuminated houses that by then formed several villages.

Roland was not concerned with precision in scale: his layout was eccentric, fun and full of character, and never meant to be taken seriously. In a parallel that echoes the revealing of the Forbidden Corner at Tuppill (Yorkshire), Roland was encouraged by friends and family to open his garden to the public in 1929.

In the beginning there was no admission charge, but all visitors were invited to put a donation in the charity box if they wished. The proceeds initially went to the Railway Benevolent Institution, but this was later joined by the Church Army and other charities.



The village was soon featured in newspapers, cinema newsreels and magazines across the world, encouraging thousands to flock to see 'the real-life Lilliput', including Princess Elizabeth who spent the eve of her 8th birthday there in April 1934.

Roland Callingham maintained an involvement with the attraction until his death in 1961, aged 80. The main beneficiaries of the site are still the Salvation

Army, which since 1978 has co-managed the attraction through its volunteers. Today it shares its revenues with other charities.

Below: Roland Callingham at Bekonscot
Photo: Bekonscot Model Village



Other Sites

Bekonscot's charitable character has inspired several other model villages, including **Minimundus** on the Wörthersee at Klagenfurt in Carinthia (Austria). Created in 1958 it displays over 150 miniature models of famous buildings from around the world, all built at the popular ratio of 1:25. Since its opening more than 15 million visitors have visited the 2.6 hectare park.

Proceeds from Minimundus are donated to the children's charity *Rettet das Kind* ("Save the Child"), which owns the park. Its sister park at **Meckenbeuren-Liebenau**, near the Bodensee (Germany) has no mention of charity, but amongst its promotion pictures is a photo of the labyrinth of the Villa Pisani at

St. Peter's Basilica, Rome in Minimundus. Photo: Binter on de.wikipedia



Stra (Italy), with the belvedere folly tower in the middle.

The International Association of Miniature Parks claims that the original incentive to build model villages was to raise money for charities. This was followed by the desire to educate and to have fun.

There are several problems for today's model worlds. One is that nowadays more people than ever have the opportunity to travel and visit famous places for real. Television and the internet also spoils us with moving images of interesting buildings from around the world. It means that the old model parks have to invest in new attractions, hands-on features and events to keep all visitors interested.

Another problem is that the maintenance is labour-intensive and therefore expensive. This is especially true of private model villages when their builder's enthusiasm or powers start to fail.

An example of this is **LaReau's World of Miniature Buildings**, which Pieter and I reported on in *FOLLIES* 62; 6-7. We were there in 2005 and wrote that 'In 1964, Paul LaReau of Pardeeville, Wisconsin, USA, started building miniature buildings in his backyard as a hobby, just to please himself and his wife Clarice. As so often happens: he couldn't stop; the hobby grew out of hand, and now there are over a hundred models, all Styrofoam, covered with acrylic paint...Paul opened his collection for visitors around 1980, but recently he closed his garden because insurance and maintenance cost became too much.' His models were restored, are for sale and waiting for a new owner who can afford to keep the collection together.

Something similar occurred at **Bokrijk in Miniature** at Balen (Belgium), which we saw in 1994.





Its builder, Leon Caelen, had been working since 1970 on models for a miniature version of the famous Bokrijk open air museum in Genk. Caelen's wooden models of Flemish rural buildings included roofs that could be removed to show meticulously furnished interiors and implements. It was like keeping a doll's house in the garden: it didn't last. Gone. History.

Barbara Jones describes a second model village that did not make it into *H+M Follies*: the model village behind the Old New Inn at **Bourton-on-the-Water** (Glos). Here the buildings are much larger at one-ninth scale, and building materials being the same as of the modelled buildings. It was built by a former landlord of the Old New Inn, and took local craftsmen five years to complete before it was officially opened on King George VI and Queen Elizabeth's Coronation Day in 1937.

Today the model village has a model village of its own, adding to the sense of folly that Barbara Jones enjoyed as 'a good Chinese

box sensation,' according to the 1953 edition of her *Follies and Grottoes* book.

Bourton also differs from other model villages in its use of bonsai trees, but no figurines for people. The miniature scenes with matching manikins,



built by a hundred expert model makers in the early 2000s are in Miniature World, a separate indoor exhibition within the Inn's garden.

In *Journal 9* (p.73) Pieter and I described how Christian Abrie's hobby of building a mountain network for model trains in his garden in Chatte (France) turned into a tourist attraction. It started in the 1980s with a few railway lines round a model of a local abbey, but then the bank clerk enlisted the help of his son, Gaëtan, and it

expanded to 1,100 metres of rail with hundreds of miniature buildings based on those in the surrounding area, with the nearby St-Marcellin represented in facades and trompe l'oeil. We were particularly enthusiastic about the picnickers in their model of the nearby Palais Idéal at Hauterives.

There are 18 model villages in the UK alone that are open to the public and many others in most countries across the world.

Should miniature villages be included as follies?

The question was pondered in 2009 by Edwin Heathcote, architectural correspondent to the Financial Times, who sees Bekonscot as 'the most complete example of what appears to be a peculiarly English obsession: a whimsical cocktail of miniature villages, model railways and ornamental gardens.'

Inevitably his article focused on the issue of size and implied that miniature villages are built by boys and 'passionate hobbyists' playing with train sets. Of course the size issue is irrelevant to this debate especially considering that when it was being built Madurodam was the biggest construction project in The Netherlands after Schipol Airport.

One tricky aspect is that miniature villages resemble amusement parks in the same way that Legoland and Disneyland do. But are they not the modern equivalents of Stowe and Stourhead, albeit without any of the Masonic or political undertones?

Heathcote believes that these places take us back to a 'banal version of tourist cliché or local

nostalgia' and argues that they are 'a suburban riposte to the romanticism of the English garden with its follies, grottoes and fake ruins. Both refer to half-remembered, half-mythical, bucolic worlds, one of arcadia and the other of suburbia.'

Ultimately, he says, they allow us to 'step outside the everyday and perceive it instead from above. It then becomes something full of wonder, just as the most mundane and familiar landscape becomes mesmerically fascinating when seen from an aircraft. These tiny towns transform through scale and, through making everything artificial and strange, make it all fascinating again.'

Will Self, who used Bekonscot for the basis of his book *Scale*, believes that "the miniature is the archetypal artwork," and therein lies the nub of the problem—are these miniature villages a form of art or architecture? (AP)

Unless otherwise stated, all pictures in this edition of the Bulletin are taken by the author 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.

