



Issue 46:

September 2012

Events calendar:

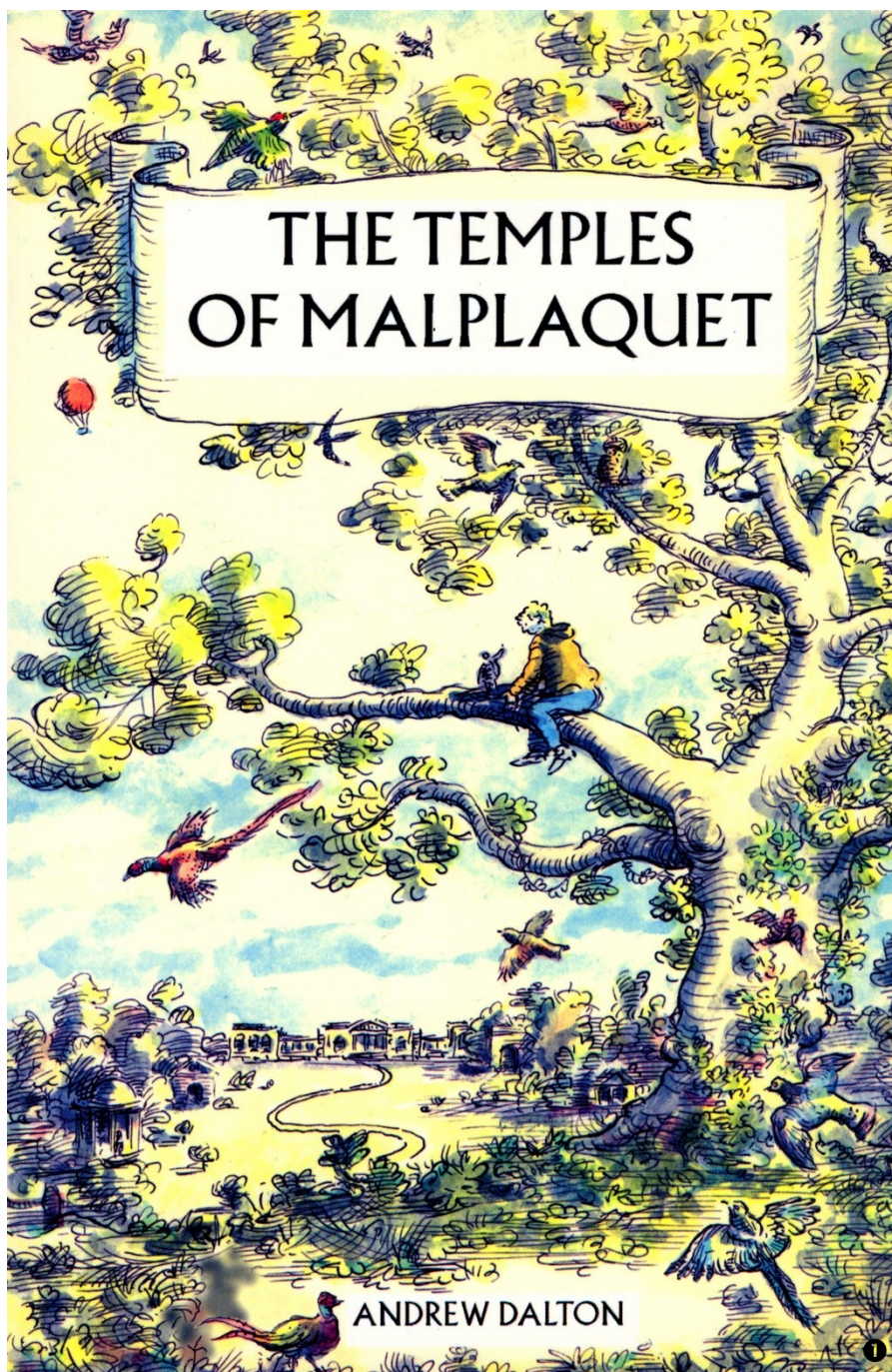
- **8 September—Garden Party picnic at Stowe Landscape Gardens:** Details from www.follies.org.uk
- **22-23 September—Lisbon (Portugal):** A weekend visit to the extraordinary gardens at Sintra (Lisbon). Details from pfgodfrey@gmail.com
- **30 October—St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, London:** Lucinda Lambton talk on Hadlow Tower (and other follies), followed by an update on Vivat Trust's restoration by architect Paul Sharrock. Details from aliceclyates@hotmail.com

Heritage Open Days:

- **6-9 September—England and Northern Ireland**
- **All weekends in September—Scotland and Wales**

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.



With this year's summer garden party returning to Stowe, Rita Boogaart takes the opportunity to introduce us to Andrew Dalton's book *The Temples of Malplaquet*, which uses Stowe's Arcadian landscape as the setting for his trilogy of novels.

Often compared with the works

of C.S. Lewis for its cross-generational style, and illustrated with Jonny Boatfield's beautiful black and white vignettes, the book tells the story of a thirteen-year-old boy who discovers a secret world during an otherwise ordinary family day out to the mysterious temples of Malplaquet—Stowe. (AP)

Malplaquet is a place in Flanders close to the French town of Bavay (59) and is where the Duke of Marlborough fought his fourth, bloodiest and least conclusive victory over Louis XIV's French army on 11 September 1709. His most spectacular victory over the hitherto invincible French had taken place five years earlier and saw him rewarded with an estate in Oxfordshire named 'Blenheim' after the site in Bavaria where the battle took place.

One of Marlborough's officers at Malplaquet was General Sir Richard Temple, the 4th Baronet and 1st Viscount Cobham. He had already distinguished himself in what was known as the War of the Spanish Succession, most notably at the Siege of Lille in 1708. His endeavours at Malplaquet were just as significant so it would not have been too far-fetched for him to adopt the name for his estate at Stowe (Bucks), which is precisely what the author T.H. White did for his novel *Mistress Masham's Repose*.

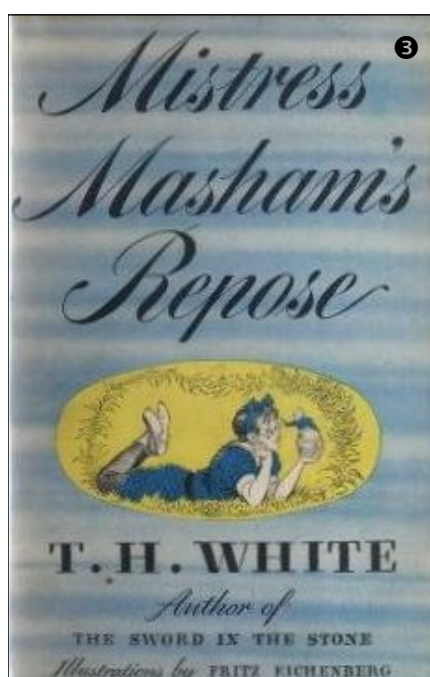
White was a teacher at Stowe School between 1932 and 1936, before the gardens were cleared and restored, and used them as the locus for *Mistress Masham's Repose*, first published in 1946. Its main character (Maria) is a ten-year-old orphaned girl who is bullied by her bitter governess Miss Brown, and her guardian the Rev.



Hater, both of whom are after her inheritance. Only an indulging cook and an absent-minded professor living in the grounds of her dilapidated ancestral home are her allies, and Miss Brown's crippling migraines her only chance to escape.

One of Maria's 'piracy bouts' reaches an overgrown island in the Quincunx lake—Miss

Masham's Repose—where a pristine rotunda on well-manicured grass stands at its heart. She finds it inhabited by Lilliputians, and the story tells of her meeting them, her winning their trust, and finally their discovery by Brown and Hater who plan to sell them for big money. Instead, they are charged with embezzlement after proof is provided by the Lilliputians.





The book is amusingly written, but the characters are rather exaggerated and the plot highly moralistic, as is usual in fairy tales. The most intriguing element, however, is that Lilliputians were still surviving at Stowe after WWII. How did they get there? Lemuel Gulliver wasn't allowed to take any people, not even on their request, but he was given some cows and sheep.

White's idea was that Captain John Biddle, who rescued Gulliver after two days at sea and was rewarded with a few of the miniature cows and sheep, managed to find Lilliput on another voyage. There he gathered enough of the people to breed at home and show them for money. One of those shows was at Malplaquet where the displaced Lilliputians managed to escape and hide for centuries in exile on the island.

Is it too far-fetched to think that Jonathan Swift, the erstwhile secretary to Sir William Temple, saw some of the Lilliputians at Stowe and told their story in *Gulliver's Travels*, adding that Lemuel only returned with animals to protect the people who were hiding there.

Embroidering on that theme is the *Malplaquet trilogy*, written by Andrew Dalton and complete with map and many drawings by Jonny Boatfield. Visits to Stowe as a child, working at the school as a housemaster for several years and particularly a holiday stay at the

Gothic Temple encouraged Dalton to embark on his sequel to White's *Mistress Masham's Repose*, which was itself a sequel to *Gulliver's Travels*.

In Dalton's books, Maria has reached old age and is known as 'Granny'. She had already moved the Lilliputians to a new model village in the Japanese gardens after their hiding place had been discovered (in White's book), even though it meant making themselves scarce when the garden opened for charity on Fridays—where have we heard that before? For as long as Maria was restoring the house all went well, but her inheritance couldn't stretch forever

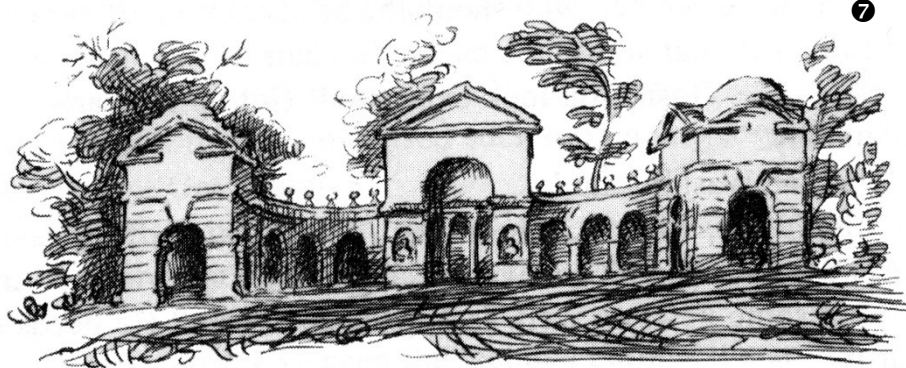
and eventually she was forced to sell her estate to a school and retreat to Bell Cottage at the back of one of the Lake Pavilions. From there she continues to protect the Lilliputians.

With the schoolboys and the National Trust temple restorers closing in, the little people spread themselves over the estate in 'the Great Divergence'. Their kingdom is organised in four provinces with different attitudes and tasks related to the mystic atmosphere of the landscape and its temples, and they meet in the Gothic Temple for their Provincial Assembly. The Cascadians are very good at sports and boating; Palladians are close to nature, know their plants and befriend animals; those from the Grecian Valley are warriors, constantly on manoeuvres; and the people of Elysium are the educated ones—historians, eloquent speakers and 'word-players', aided by the Stream of Consciousness and the Temple of Ancient Virtue.

In her pursuit for help to protect the Lilliputians, Granny selects the thirteen-year-old Jamie Thompson to be her Assistant Guide because he can feel the mystic atmosphere of the gardens, and see and hear the Lilliputians while they go unnoticed by everyone else.

The books are full of Jamie's adventures with Nigriff, the historian/archivist and leader of the Lilliputians, who gradually explains his people's involvement with Mal-





plaquet. He shows Jamie a manuscript signed by Alexander Pope, with its unknown poem containing a prophecy about the end of this Garden Kingdom and the beginning of a new one.

United in their struggle, and helped by Granny, Jamie, Vicky (a National Trust volunteer) and Ralph (the old gardener), the Lilliputians try to chase the invaders out of their world, with the aim of creating an ideal paradise based on the original Lilliput. In the Pebble Alcove some of them even have visions of Gulliver and of Lilliput Island having the same shape as Malplaquet.

Pope's well-known poem about Stowe tells us to 'consult the genius of the place in all'. Could that genius have been one of the Lilliputians brought in by Biddle, in which case the later outlay of the landscaped garden would resemble homeland Lilliput? It is all very plausible, particularly for the imaginative reader.

A New Empire of Malplaquet needs to be established urgently when the National Trust completes

its restoration of the temples and the ha-ha. That work is completed under the management of Jedekia Biddle, a nasty descendant of Captain Biddle with a similar craving for making money from breeding the Lilliputians; the little people are becoming more and more visible as the magical atmosphere returns to the park.

The apotheosis is a spectacular light-show on the night that the Trust celebrates its completion of the ha-ha project, the moment when Biddle hoped to catch all the Lilliputians in one go.

Before thousands of visitors and as sculptures from all over the park come to life, a vision of Lilliput Island hovers over the park. With the Lilliputians standing hand-in-hand in a large circle on the completed ha-ha, they magically ascend into their homeland, a paradise resembling Malplaquet.

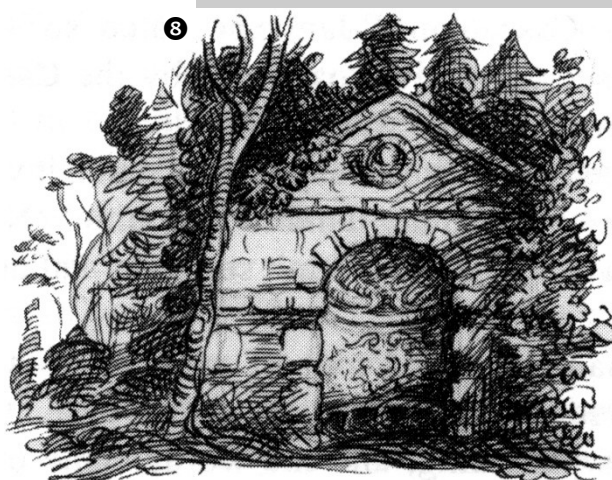
The Malplaquet Trilogy:

- *The Temples of Malplaquet* (2005)
- *The Lost People of Malplaquet* (2007)
- *The New Empire of Malplaquet* (2009)

All published by The Lutterworth Press.

Andrew Dalton occasionally organises Malplaquet days for children at Stowe, and does readings and meet-the-author sessions for schools. He is presently Head of Religious Studies at Shrewsbury School.

All of the illustrations here are reproduced with the generous blessing of Jonny Boatfield, who not only did all of the illustrations for the Malplaquet Trilogy, but has also completed work for the National Trust. A reconstruction of the Witches House by him was temporarily erected at Stowe for a special event, but has now gone.



Or the other way round: it is Malplaquet—Stowe—that is the paradise.



Pictures:

- ❶ Dust jacket (front) of *The Temples of Malplaquet*.
- ❷ Tapestry of the Battle of Malplaquet from Blenheim Palace.
- ❸ Dust jacket from T H White's *Mistress Masham's Repose* (first edition).
- ❹ The Rotunda.
- ❺ The Temple of British Worthies.
- ❻ The Gothic Temple.
- ❼ The Temple of Venus.
- ❽ The Pebble Alcove.
- ❾ Dust jacket (rear) of *The Temples of Malplaquet*.

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The Ambulatory Chinese House, Tea-House, Temple

George Bickham's book on *The Beauties of Stow, Or, A Description of the Most Noble House, Gardens & Magnificent Buildings Therein, of the Right Hon'ble Earl Temple, Viscount & Baron Cobham: With Above Thirty Plates of Each Particular Building, Two Views of the House, and a Curious General Plan of the Whole Gardens* was published in 1753 and sold for one guinea (or two guineas if you wanted it hand-tinted). A copy of it exists in the Neville Hawkes collection of the Folly Fellowship's picture library, with just a few of the scanned pages missing.

What makes the book particularly interesting is its description

and illustrations of buildings that no longer exist at Stowe, and the original locations of the ones that do. It includes an engraving of the **Chinese House** beside the Palladian Bridge but it is a mirrored version of the one in Benton Seeley's guide of 1744 showing the building on stilts in the water of the river Alder (now replaced by the grass of the Elysian Fields). His description of it says:

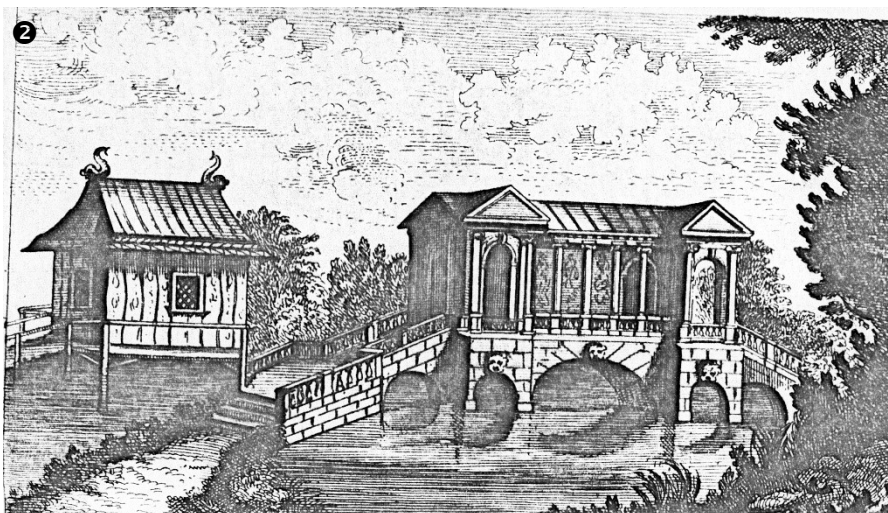
'And now, as we cross that Alley, we are stuck with the sight of a pretty Building, called, *The CHINESE HOUSE*. It is situated on Piles in the Middle of a river: You enter it by a Bridge, adorned with Chinese Vases, with Flowers in them: It is

a square Building (according to the Drawing, or Print), with Four Lattices, and covered with Sail-cloth to preserve the Paintings, which are done by Mr. Sclater.'

William Gilpin visited Stowe in 1748 while studying at Queen's College, Oxford, and described them in his book *A Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire*. It records the imaginary dialogue between two gentlemen walking the gardens together, and says about the Chinese House:

'In my Opinion, it is a pretty Object enough, and varies our View in a very becoming Manner. Its cool stand upon the

Rita Boogaart



Lake, and those canvas Windows, designed as well to keep out the Sun, as let in the Air, give us a good Notion of the Manner of living in an hot Country.'

Gilpin then describes the interior, which he initially praises as 'Finely painted indeed!' but then criticises:

'Our Travellers tell us the Chinese are a very ingenious People; and that Arts and Sciences flourish amongst them in great Beauty. But for my Part, whenever I see any of their Paintings, I am apt, I must confess, in everything else to call their Taste into question. It is impossible for one Art to be in Perfection, without introducing the rest. They are all Links of the same Chain: If you draw up one, you must expect the rest will follow. Cognoscitur ex socio, is an old Rule you know in judging of Men; and I believe it may be applied with as much Propriety in judging of Arts. It is hardly to be imagined that any Art, perfect in its Kind, would claim any Kindred, or even bear to keep Company with such a wretched Art of Painting as prevails amongst the Chinese: Its whole Mystery consists in dawbing on glaring Colours: Correctness of Drawing, Beauty of Composition, and harmony of colouring,

they seem not to have even the least Notion of.'

He concludes by saying:

'I like your Reflections extremely. We should certainly have some more elegant Productions from China, if they were able to answer the Character I have sometimes heard given of them. They have very little of true, manly Taste, I fancy, among them: Their Ingenuity lies chiefly in the knick-knack Way; and is, I imagine, pretty much of the Dutch Kind.'

In 1751, when the gardens were being modernised, the Chinese House was moved to nearby Wotton where Cobham's sister Hester Temple lived. It was initially installed on China Island, beyond Wotton's Palladian Bridge, a site that is today marked by a Sentry Box, or Mab, erected by Mrs Brunner.

The Chinese House ended its stay at Wotton near the kitchen garden, from where it was bought by Major Michael Beaumont (a former owner of Wotton) and removed to Harristown House in County Kildare. That is where my husband and I saw it on 4 August 1991, set between fruit trees and protected with a chicken wire fence. Major Beaumont's grandson allowed us to take pictures of his Chinese Tea-House. He told us that its maintenance was beyond his means but he was negotiating its repatriation to the UK.

Soon after this the National Trust bought the building,

restored it and in 1996-97 had it reinstalled at Stowe in the Japs—the rock and water garden above the Palladian Bridge.

The project was completed in memory of Gervase Jackson-Stops who had developed plans for the reinstallation in his article *Sharawadgi rediscovered* (Apollo, 1993). Tim Knox also describes it in his article *Architectural Colour* in *Stowe*, 2002 (<http://crcv.revues.org/2103>).

When the Folly Fellowship visited Wotton on 15 August 1998 for our garden party, the cake was in the shape of the Chinese House—the outer casing now rests there.



Pictures:

- ❶ The Chinese House at Stowe (Picture: Ana Luisa Fernandes—<http://anainstowe>).
- ❷ The Chinese House and Palladian Bridge, from Bickham's *The Beauties of Stowe* etc.
- ❸ The cake from the 1998 Garden Party
- ❹ One of the interior painted panels in August 1991.

Unless otherwise stated, all pictures were taken by the author.

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