I wrote this article just weeks after the devastating fire that tore through Clandon Park on 29 April. Like so many, I arrived to help on that night. Now, unexpectedly, I find myself still here, helping to plan the salvage operation. It was a grim experience for so many of us to have to stand by and watch the destruction of Clandon Park, at once a home, an architectural masterpiece, a repository of so many remarkable artefacts, and an extraordinary workplace.

The rapaciousness of fire, its ability to consume so quickly and so completely the artistry and craft skills of centuries, is terrifying, mesmerising and astounding. My memories of that night are of contrasting noises: not just of the fire itself and the breaking glass and falling who knows what, but more surprisingly the din of engines, pumps and hoses, generators, voices, and the inevitable mobile phones. With no electricity, by nightfall the entire site was plunged into darkness save for the reds, oranges and yellows of the flames glowing inside the house, emanating from the rooftop, and sometimes licking the stone and brick walls. On the west side the air was cold and dewy; on the east it was filled with smoke and ash, which became ingrained in our hair and our clothes and by morning had laid a film of filth over our cars. The birds, untroubled by the events of the night, began their chorus.

Having raged for more than twelve hours, the fire was largely out by midday. A close inspection of the house with the Surrey Fire and Rescue Commander revealed some remarkable things. I walked through an untouched front door towards the smoking mass of charred timbers fallen like giant spillikins that was once the Marble Hall; there I saw the superb carved marble overmantels by John Michael Rysbrack untouched. Likewise astonishing was my first tantalising glimpse of the Onslow State Bed, surviving against all odds in the State Bedroom where the heat had devoured the paper from the walls. These were joyous moments amid the horror, and their discovery has sustained my optimism through all our subsequent challenges. I once cursed the heavy-handed dry-rot treatment of our predecessors, but now find myself thankful that the wooden lintels had been replaced with concrete: $ continued on page 2

SILVER CASTER FOR DUNHAM MASSEY

A silver caster, with the mark of Daniel Piers, London, 1746, was purchased at auction at Christie’s, King Street, London, on 3 June 2015 (lot 636), for £4,375 including buyer’s premium.

The caster is engraved with the arms of Grey impaling Booth, for Henry Grey, 4th Earl of Stamford (1715-1768), and his wife Lady Mary (1704-1772), the daughter of George Booth, 2nd Earl of Warrington (1675-1758). Inv. no. NT2900123
thanks to this, the second-floor windows and the parapet above remained intact instead of being consumed, arguably saving the house from further destruction.

That no one was killed, that the Speakers’ Parlour remains largely intact, and that so many wonderful items from the collection were rescued are thanks to the dedication of Surrey Fire and Rescue Service supported by a salvage plan, and to National Trust staff and volunteers. Since then the response of colleagues from other heritage organisations has been generous and much appreciated, with many offers of advice, help and practical assistance coming from across the UK and much further afield.

Readers will no doubt want to know how the fire started, how much of the collection has been saved, and what will happen to Clandon Park in the future. The short answer is that we do not know why or how the fire began. Once safe and clear access inside the house is established, fire investigators will carry out their specialist work and make a report as soon as they are able. As for the Onslow and Gubbay collections, more than 350 items were removed from the house on the day of the fire, including paintings, clocks, porcelain, silver, books and furniture. Another 50 or so items were recovered, mostly from the Speakers’ Parlour, on two subsequent occasions; these included its huge carpet, the curtains, and a large carved and gilded picture frame. As for the future, it is still too early to know what will be in the long term. Our immediate priorities are protecting the building against decay, securing internal structures, and preparing the site so that major archaeological salvage work can begin.

In the meantime, this has been a period of intense activity for everyone at Clandon Park, and it has involved all areas of the National Trust. This includes the safeguarding of the salvaged collection by transferring it to a secure store - here objects can be assessed and treatment proposed if necessary. We are working with structural engineers to assess the stability of the house; its Venetian architect Giacomo Leoni (c.1686-1746) designed it with a generous specification (four bricks thick at basement level and only slimming to three at the second floor), which is reassuringly solid. A 3-D laser survey of the house has been commissioned, using drone, time-lapse and other record photography. We are planning the removal of roofing lead, precarious timbers, bricks, windows, collapsed steels, and the grotesque layer of metal spaghetti to enable internal access, which started towards the end of June. The sampling of ash is being arranged. We have engaged a specialist scaffolder to design self-supporting scaffolding to wrap and roof this 45m x 24m four-storey house; this job will take approximately ten weeks. We are writing methodologies to inform both the careful removal of the debris and the search for artefacts and the subsequent cleaning, assessment and treatment of the longed-for discoveries. We need to plan where, on this seven-acre site, we can accommodate offices, staff welfare, and storage, both for salvaged historical plaster and collection objects, and also for tools and equipment. This became more of a challenge once the excellent team at Historic England had carried out a geophysical survey of the east lawn: this revealed (to our great satisfaction) that the garden laid out by Richard, 1st Lord Onslow (1654-1717) lies just beneath the lawn. And, of course, we are not forgetting electricity, water, Wi-Fi, and waste management, including recycling where possible. All this and much more has been researched, discussed, and recorded using Gantt charts (bar charts for illustrating project schedules) and numerous spreadsheets, and then discussed again with our insurers and their loss adjustors.

Some of us have become accustomed to the stark bare-brick appearance of this new Clandon. But this is just a passing phase. We know that decay is inevitable if it is not stopped, and its early signs are here already: the faint green tinge of nature showing on internal walls, the roosting of birds, and the sighting of a rat.

Sophie Chessum, Curator and Salvage Lead
THE PECKOVERS AND R.E. HART
Collectors, Philanthropists and Kindred Spirits

‘Catalogue of valuable printed books, illuminated and other manuscripts. Autograph letters and historical documents from the celebrated collection of the late Lord Peckover of Wisbech.’

This is the title of the seven Sotheby’s sale catalogues dating between 1927 and 1951, and just a glance through them makes one appreciate how ‘celebrated’ the books and manuscripts ought to be.

Standing in the Library at Peckover House, Cambridgeshire (formerly Bank House, renamed by the National Trust in 1948 in commemoration of the family) one used only to be able to imagine what an impressive sight these books made when they were in their places on the bookshelves. Now, for the first time in eighty years, visitors can see some of these books, and representative pieces from the collection, back in their original home as part of a loan from the R.E. Hart collection at Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery. In collaboration with Blackburn Museum and Mark Purcell, Libraries Curator for the National Trust, we have put together an exhibition that highlights some of the most spectacular examples of early and rare psalters and books of hours in the country.

The books reflect a tale of two collectors: R.E. (Edward) Hart and the Peckover family. Their collections share a common thread of faith, philanthropy, privacy, education, wealth, and compassion; both R.E. Hart and the Peckovers selflessly fulfilled the needs of others during their lifetime, and made investments and gifts in their communities that would last well into future generations.

Probably the most important object in the exhibition is the Peckover Psalter, purchased by Edward Hart in the Sotheby’s sale of 12 December 1927. It was first brought into the Peckover family collection by Jonathan Peckover (1755-1833), the first Peckover of Wisbech, during the late 18th century. Jonathan purchased the Psalter (dated 1220-40) from the Jesuit College in Osnaburg (Osnabruck), Germany. It is regarded as one of the gems of the Hart collection, and would have had equal standing in the Peckover collection. The Psalter features dozens of illuminated and decorated initials, pen flourishes, and line fillers in colour throughout the text, and ten full-page miniatures featuring scenes from the life of Christ painted against luxurious backgrounds of gold. Although the original patron of the Psalter is unknown, it is suggested that it was made in a Parisian monastery, and subsequently stayed in the eastern region of France for some centuries.

The Sotheby’s catalogue tells us that in 1927 the Peckover Psalter was the property of Miss Algerina Peckover (deceased) of Sibalds Holme, Wisbech. The collection was very much a family affair, and the book must have passed from Algeron to Alexander, and then to Algerina, remaining in her collection until her death, when it was sold under instructions from her executors, most probably to the Penrose family, to whom she was great-aunt, and who instructed nearly all the Sotheby’s sales of the Peckover book collection.

The Peckover Psalter realised £3,500 at the sale in 1927, a figure equivalent to around £200,000 today. This was the highest value for a book in the sale, and reflects the deep pocket and good eye of its purchaser, Edward Hart. It is interesting to note that the name alongside the annotated sale catalogue is not Hart, but possibly Coutts (the writing is not absolutely clear). Hart was known to be surreptitious about his purchases, using an agent to make a purchase, or a pseudonym at a sale.

Although the Peckovers as a Quaker family were prevented from going to university and entering certain professions, they made great strides in trades such as shop keeping, farming, manufacturing and in particular banking. Jonathan Peckover founded Peckovers Bank soon after he moved to Wisbech in 1777 aged 22, and the wealth he gained from the business allowed him to overcome the limited education he would have received as a non-conformist. A self-educated man with broad knowledge, he established the Wisbech Literary Society and became a vice-president of the Wisbech Auxiliary of the British and Foreign Bible Society; it is most probably through his connection with the latter that he sought out and purchased the Peckover Psalter.

A respected Quaker with a substantial estate and successful business, he had seven children, two of whom, William (1790-1877) and Algernon (1803-93), inherited their father’s banking business and his collecting and philanthropic inclinations. Like Edward Hart a generation later, they amassed a collection and legacy that would benefit and affect the town in which they lived. The brothers gave generously to the town of Wisbech and were instrumental in the founding of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum in 1835, which still houses Peckover bequests. Algernon designed and financed the addition of the reading room to the library at the museum in 1887, and the museum served as an extension of their personal collections, which by now had filled Bank House (Peckover) and Sibalds Holme, where Algernon lived. Both brothers were active in the running of the museum, with William serving as its President from 1854 to 1869 and donating substantial funds and collections to it. In 1869 the brothers assisted with the purchase of nineteen acres of land for the first public park in Wisbech, a generous gift to the town which is still used to this day.

It was with Algernon’s son, Alexander, Lord Peckover (1830-1919) that the pinnacle of the Peckovers’ collecting habits was reached. At Peckover we have always thought that Alexander was the main collector and bibliophile of the family. Through further research, it seems that Alexander was also the curator of the fami-
Like Alexander Peckover, Edward Hart was involved in the family business, in his case that of rope-making. He was the fourth generation of the Hart family to work his way up the business, and became director on the death of his father. He was also active in civil, but not political, life in Blackburn, promoting and supporting Blackburn businesses and being involved in philanthropic concerns and helping promote Christianity amongst the townspeople. Like Jonathan Peckover, he was a supporter of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and his mother, Hannah, had been a teacher at a Sunday school. J.G. Shaw in his *History of Thomas Hart’s Rope Works of Blackburn* (1930) describes Hart as ‘an advocate of education of the working classes [and] friend of the poor’. His most significant gift was that of £35,000 to the town council for the purchase of Witton Park estate in 1946. The house and grounds were to benefit the townspeople by recreation and education; this, along with his lifetime collection donated to the Library and Museum in Blackburn, sealed his legacy in the town.

Hart and the Peckovers were similar. They were well-educated, and advocates for education; wealthy, and ran businesses; public minded, and yet still very private. The purchase of the Peckover Psalter from the Peckover collection by Hart has a pleasing symmetry: Hart and the Peckovers, both wealthy philanthropists and passionate collectors, would have taken equal delight in the manuscript. I am sure they would feel great pleasure in knowing that the Peckover Psalter is now on display in the Library at Peckover House once again, if only for a short while. What will still live on in Wisbech and Blackburn are the generous donations of collections, museums and parks for the education and recreation of their citizens made by the Peckover family and R. E. Hart.

The exhibition has been put together with the kind help of Vinai Solanki (former curator of Blackburn Museum), Paul Flintoff (Blackburn Museum) and Mark Purcell, Libraries Curator for the National Trust, and is on view until the 1 November, 2015.

The books on display are as follows:

- The Peckover Psalter, 1220-40
- The Blackburn Psalter, 1260-80
- Book of Hours, Use of Sarum, c.1440
- Book of Hours, Use of Rome, c.1470-80
- Book of Hours, Use of Rome, c.1430-90

**Ben Rickett, Peckover House**

2 Another Peckover manuscript was sold at Christies in July, 2011 for £200,000 —The Peckover Hours, Use of Rome, in Latin and French, illuminated manuscript on vellum – so one could say that Lord Peckover was right to say that collecting would not be his ruin.
UNCLOAKING DUDMASTON’S GARDEN

‘What a very special and unrecognised landscape …’¹

After more than 875 years of ownership by generations of the same family, Dudmaston Hall, Garden and Estate in South Shropshire was given to the National Trust by Captain Geoffrey Wolrych Whitmore and his niece Rachel Labouchère in 1978. Their intention was twofold: that one of Shropshire’s oldest estates should be preserved in its entirety, and also that the house and garden should be filled with things old and new that would surprise and delight visitors. Lady Labouchère respected Dudmaston’s gardening past, which over time embraced aspects of Picturesque, Regency and Victorian design; she also made her own modern additions and alterations to the garden, not least by installing some of Sir George Labouchère’s abstract sculpture in strategic locations. Dudmaston is a garden which has seen changing fashions, and here the old survives alongside the, quite unexpected, new.

The garden is one of the parts of Dudmaston which visitors most love: the sweeping lawns, impressive grass terraces, colourful shrubs and far-reaching views are consistently admired. However, recent research has revealed that there is more to this garden than meets the eye.² Like most historical gardens, Dudmaston’s is made up of several historical and aesthetic layers, natural and man-made, the result of work by successive generations of owners who were either plant lovers or followers of fashion, or indeed both. For about 100 years (c. 1770 to 1870) Dudmaston was horticulturally aspirational and ‘up with fashion’.³ Whilst undoubtedly still beautiful, there is now a need to re-awaken the garden and its setting from what feels like decades of slumber, during which its significance, planting and sightlines have become blurred and obscured. The aim is not radically to change it, but rather to enhance and re-invigorate the key layers and help increase visitors’ understanding and enjoyment of these, particularly that of the Picturesque. It is also about a progressive re-claiming of views to re-instate the garden’s relationship with the park and the wider landscape.

What gives Dudmaston’s garden and its setting its intrinsic character is also something that is currently largely unnoticed: its dramatic topography. Over time, water eroded the soft red sandstone landscape to form deep, narrow valleys and chains of pools which encircle the house and garden, which is set above the Severn Valley on a sandstone bluff with views west towards the Clee Hills. This topography provided the late 18th-century landscapers with a superb natural canvas with which to work. However, its drama is now largely cloaked by trees, over-mature vegetation and mid-20th-century shelter belts.

In the late 18th century, under William Whitmore, Dudmaston’s garden was in a simple, pastoral style, *or ferme ornée*, with sloping pastures sweeping right up to the house in its elevated position; its appearance then was captured by Moses Griffith in 1793 (see illustration). This was in keeping with the design for the parkland proposed by William Emes: his 1777 *Plan of The Intended Sheep Pasture about Dudmaston* survives in the collection.

The natural sandstone outcrops and cuttings were appropriated into the garden as Picturesque ‘incidents’ or features. These included the Rockery, the mysterious Ladies’ Bath and, most importantly, the Dingle. The principal designer of Dudmaston’s Dingle with its delightful circuit of paths, seats, ornamental bridge and cascades has yet to be positively identified, but William Whitmore’s wife Frances is credited with it, with the help of her gardener Walter Wood. Her daughter wrote: ‘The Dingle was a pet of our dear mother’s. She laid out the walks therein, placed seats and formed cascades in conjunction with Walter Wood, whom we called Planter, and was for many years gardener at Dudmaston’.

Walter Wood may have been inspired or influenced by similar Picturesque dingles nearby: William Shenstone’s at The Leasowes (Halesowen), and the Dingle at Badger, where William Emes also worked in the 1780s. A copy of Shenstone’s book *Unconnected Thoughts on Gardening* (1764), outlining his design principles, was in the library at Dudmaston. However, no direct evidence linking either property to Dudmaston has yet come to light.

In the early 19th century, William Whitmore’s son, William Wolryche Whitmore, and his wife Lady Lucy Bridgeman⁴ were a young married couple keen on making their mark on Dudmaston’s garden and the setting of the house. He clearly displayed an eye for landscape and its potential for...
embellishment and improvement. He effectively shaped the structure and boundaries of the garden that we know today, including the impressive terracing which descends steeply from the house towards the lake, Big Pool, forming this out of several smaller pools, and thus creating one of the garden’s most significant aspects. The elegant (now disused) north-eastern approach to the house was introduced, making the most of the view of the house in its elevated position above the newly-included lake and making this a key sightline (see illustration, previous page). This view is now obscured by trees.

William Wolryche Whitmore added floral interest to the setting of the house. He also embraced the fashion for importing exotic trees and shrubs from America to form the American Garden, something which marks Dudmaston out as different from so many other gardens. His library included Maud’s Botanic Garden of 1825-26 with several hand-coloured plates of American species, and this planting tradition has survived to the present day. Gravelled walks and planting in front of service wings and stables formed a link from the house to the new American Garden. His planting of specimen trees in the Lower American Garden ‘forms the clearest example of William Wolryche Whitmore’s early garden boundary work, although it is in a decayed state … the loss of this key element would be regrettable.’

By the mid-19th century, William and Lady Lucy had created a series of terraces and axial stone steps near the house with exuberant, colourful parterres, island planting beds, elaborate ‘ribbon’ borders, specimen conifers and carpet bedding designs. Glass-houses produced tender bedding plants for these beds dotted around the lawns, and there was even a glasshouse fully on show on the prime west elevation of the house (see illustrations).

The approach was, locally at least, very competitive. The Morfe Cottage Garden Society was formed in 1851 by neighbouring estates and held annual flower shows, all keen to show off their horticultural achievements.

In 1836, the Gardener’s Chronicle recorded that Dudmaston received a horticultural trade accolade for best ribbon borders and carpet bedding and enthused that ‘nothing could exceed’ Dudmaston’s ribbon planting, and that ‘standing as you could at one point and take in almost the whole of the garden, nearly a mile of ribbon was presented to view, and certainly the coup d’œil was most enchanting’. The stone steps topped with urns, now marooned halfway down the lawn terraces, are sole survivors from this period of intense gardening and formal layout, although in prolonged dry conditions the lines of the gravel paths can still be made out.

Having to cope with the estate’s £60,000 worth of debt that William Wolryche Whitmore had left, the incumbents during the late 19th century understandably adopted a lower-maintenance style of gardening. The intricately planted beds and central gravel path disappeared and the lawns themselves were set with conifers and yews. This was not a high point in the garden’s history.

In the first half of the 20th century the significant changes at Dudmaston took place in the woodland and farms rather than in the garden, as Captain Geoffrey Wolryche Whitmore’s particular interests lay in forestry and estate management. He did, however, introduce some new ornamental tree species into the garden, and the basic structure of the garden was maintained.

Unusually in terms of country house fortunes, Dudmaston experienced one of its highest points in the latter half of the 20th century: Lady Labouchere and her diplomat husband Sir George re-invigorated both the house and the garden. She combined a deep love of the place, its history and her ancestors with a more modern and international outlook towards design, due perhaps to her travels as an ambassador’s wife. A keen gardener herself, she nurtured the historical layers of the garden, but also brought in the designer James Russell; with his help she introduced a newer, freer, ‘billowing’ style of herbaceous planting, re-designing borders using plants from her family’s garden and from abroad. She wrote to him in 1973: ‘We have an old garden on a fine site with water, but it now needs some re-organisation … My husband and I feel that it is a pity to have this site not made as interesting as it obviously could be.’

Most significant was the addition of modern, abstract sculpture to the garden from her husband’s collection—both she and Sir George were patrons of the arts. Sir George’s art spills out of the house into the garden, startling the unsuspecting visitor and making strong statements in the landscape, but all the sculptures have been thoughtfully positioned (Lady Labouchere was careful to keep them out of the direct sightlines from the house). These pieces proclaim Dudmaston’s spirit of innovation and are a very tangible manifestation of the way that the garden’s design and taste of its occupants has always been on the move.

As well as embodying this spirit of innovation and new design, Lady Labouchere maintained the ornamental shrubberies of the American Garden and kept up a keen interest in the Rockery—its plants had been collected in Norway by her grandmother every
summer. With its beginnings as a naturally formed feature, and then appropriated and embellished by subsequent generations, the Rockery is significant in its survival as part of the designed garden for more than two centuries. Its current need for repair and re-planting also provides an opportunity for creative development in the 21st century and the next phase of its existence.

Dudmaston has been subject to gardening and landscape design fashions for at least 300 years. Since taking the property on less than forty years ago, the National Trust has maintained the surviving layers of the garden and has itself introduced some new elements. Now, there is a need to ‘uncloak’ Dudmaston’s historical significance and carefully reveal the important Picturesque features and views which made the most of the site’s natural drama. But it is also important to think about future opportunities in the context of Dudmaston’s spirit of innovation and its patronage of modern art and sculpture. In order to provide clear direction and guide future research, a Vision, or Philosophy of Approach, has been developed as a result of a collaborative and consultative process. This is an exciting time for Dudmaston’s garden as we work to reveal what a very special and unrecognised landscape it is.

Sarah Kay, Project Curator

ACQUISITIONS

BELTON HOUSE
A painting attributed to Nicholaes Pietersz. Berchem (1620–83), a classical landscape with figures and animals, oil on canvas, was purchased at auction at Tennants, Leyburn, on 20 March 2015, for £5,625 including buyer’s premium. Inv. no. NT2900160

CROFT CASTLE
A portrait thought to be of Sir William Croft (1593–1649) of Croft Castle, oil on canvas, was purchased at auction at Christie’s, London, on 29 October 2013, for £300,000, partly funded from gifts and bequests. Inv. no. NT2900159

DUNHAM MASSEY
A still life of flowers and fruit arranged on a stone plinth in a garden by Cornelis de Heem (1631–95), late 1680s, oil on canvas, was purchased from Johnny Van Haeften Ltd for £537,000. The painting was probably acquired by William Blashywt (1649–1777) soon after it was painted and it remained at Dyrham until sold at auction in 1956. Its acquisition by the National Trust was made possible by contributions from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Mr and Mrs Kenneth Levy bequest, the Art Fund, a fund set up by the late Hon. Simon Sainsbury, the Royal Oak Foundation and by a private donation. Inv. no. NT2900124

DYRHAM PARK
A still life of flowers and fruit arranged on a stone plinth in a garden by Cornelis de Heem (1631–95), late 1680s, oil on canvas, was purchased from Johnny Van Haeften Ltd for £537,000. The painting was probably acquired by William Blashywt (1649–1777) soon after it was painted and it remained at Dyrham until sold at auction in 1956. Its acquisition by the National Trust was made possible by contributions from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the Mr and Mrs Kenneth Levy bequest, the Art Fund, a fund set up by the late Hon. Simon Sainsbury, the Royal Oak Foundation and by a private donation. Inv. no. NT2900124

OXBURGH HALL
A portrait of Dorothy Plumpton, English School, 1659, oil on canvas, was purchased by private treaty for £8,000, partly funded from gifts and bequests. The portrait is mentioned in a mid-19th-century manuscript list of pictures at Oxburgh. It was sold at auction in 1951. Inv. no. NT2900138

PETWORTH HOUSE
A painting attributed to Aurelio Lomi (1556–1622), The Circumcision, oil painting on canvas laid down on panel, was purchased at auction at Christie’s, King Street, London, for £43,750, with a contribution from a fund set up by the late Hon. Simon Sainsbury (1930–2006). The picture was almost certainly acquired by Algernon Percy, 10th Earl of Northumberland (1662–1668), and recorded in the 1671 Petworth House picture list (as by Giorgio Vasari). It was subsequently hung in the Picture Room (now Red Room) at Petworth by Charles Seymour, 6th Duke of Somerset (1662–1748) and taken to Egremont House, London, by Charles Wyndham, 2nd Earl of Egremont (1710–63). His son George Wyndham, 3rd Earl of Egremont (1735–1837), hung it in the North Gallery and then in the Somerset Room at Petworth. It will undergo conservation before going back on display. Inv. no. NT2900157

QUEBEC HOUSE
Two commemorative ceramics, a jug and a meat plate, both showing the death of Wolfe, were purchased at auction at Christie’s South Kensington, London, on 1 April 2015 (Winkworth collection), for £750 including buyer’s premium. Inv. nos. NT2900118 and NT2900119.

Emile de Bruin, Registrar (Collections & Grants)
PAYCOCKE’S RICH ALLEGORY OF FOLLY
Unravelling the message of the inscriptions and fool imagery

This extraordinary painting, which hangs in Paycocke’s House in Coggeshall, Essex, seems unknown to recent scholarship on the figure of the fool, despite its being described in some detail in Xavier Barbier de Montault’s Traité d’Iconographie Chrétienne in 1890. The picture that the French iconographer saw was part of the collection of P-A Mordret of Angers. Mordret’s collection was dispersed in 1881, at which point we lose sight of the painting. In 1978 it was bequeathed to the Trust by the architect Marshall Sisson, R.A.

Though it has been tentatively described as ‘English/British School’ on the invaluable BBC ‘Your Paintings’ website, there can be no doubt it is French, as its provenance suggests; this is confirmed by the French forms of the names of the Biblical books (e.g. Esaié), and also the single vernacular inscription—Nous sommes trois.

Compositionally, the picture divides into five fairly distinct areas: the large fool standing centre-stage, brandishing the Key of Foolishness (CLAVIS STULTICIAE); the innumerable crowd of fools who are about to enter through the door which he has presumably just unlocked with the key; the two fools who look into the room from outside through the window; the cage of fools which appears to be suspended from the window, and into which another is in the process of being admitted; and, hovering over all in a heavenly cloud, two winged angel heads flanking a central ominous skull.

The fools are dressed in traditional parti-coloured fool costume in red/green, yellow/green, and red/yellow/green; this last tricolour combination was the obligatory motley of one of the most famous French fool-companies or sociétés joyeuses, the Infanterie Dijonnaise—but this colour mix was also traditional, and does not therefore connect our painting with Dijon specifically.

There are an unusual number of inscriptions, all but one in Latin. There are no fewer than fifteen citations from the Vulgate (thirteen from the Old Testament, two from the New), one non-Biblical phrase labelling the key, and the one inscription in the vernacular—which is of particular interest (see below). It seems as though the designer had combed through his Bible looking for any verse which features one of the several Latin words for ‘fool’, for instance sultus (12 examples), fatuus, and insipiens (two examples each). We must therefore assume some learned designer behind the painting, even if there are occasional omissions, re-orderings and downright mistakes in the quotations as they appear on the canvas.

There are no obvious dating criteria for our painting—no artist’s signature, for example—so we are forced to fall back on less exact methods for establishing its age, such as our knowledge of the fashion for such subject matter, and of the style in which it is painted. Barbier de Montault described it as ‘un tableau du XVIIe siècle’; if he is right, then I would suggest it is very early in the century, and offer ‘c.1600’ as a working estimate.

The heyday of fool imagery in France—as elsewhere in Europe—was the 16th century, and the enthusiasm for such imagery may almost be said to have begun with Sebastian Brant’s Stultifera Navis, first published in German in Basel in 1494. Owing to its 100 woodcut illustrations of fools, it rapidly became a pan-European best-seller—not one, but two illustrated translations of the Ship of Fools appeared in 1509 in England alone, to say nothing of editions in other vernaculars. Indeed, a paradoxical mark of its huge popularity was that it was quickly translated into Latin—and thus became respectable reading for any aspiring humanist scholar.

Our painting is situated firmly within that Brantian tradition: these laughing fools are not jolly jesters, for all their traditional caps and bells, but flawed specimens of our humanity, chuckling their way to perdition. If we were in any doubt as to how to read the overall message of the picture, the skull which dominates the canvas in such a sinister way would soon wipe the smile off our faces. As ever, the skull is a memento mori, a symbolic reminder that we must all die; that, in Hamlet’s words as he toys with the skull of Yorick,
fool to the court of Denmark, ‘to this favour we must come’. The quotation above the skull—exactly where we might expect a title to be, in the centre, at the top of the composition—is God’s chilling reprimand to the rich man who was ready to ‘eat, drink and be merry’: ‘Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee’ (Luke 12, 20, Authorised Version), though, if anything, put rather more bluntly in the words of the Vulgate as inscribed here: STVLTVS FACTVS EST OMNIS, ‘the fool will die this night’. In similar vein, the quotation from Psalm 48 (49 in the AV) inscribed below the left-hand angel head reminds us that INSIPIENS ET STVLTVS PERIBVNT, ‘the madman and the fool will die’. Perhaps the most significant quotation, important because of its position as the first quotation we encounter if we are reading the painting as we would a book, that is starting in the top left-hand corner, is the popular STVLTORVM INFINITVS EST NVMERVS, ‘the number of fools is infinite’; this comes from the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes, hinting at the universality of human folly.

In fact, I would go so far as to posit that the entire composition may even have been inspired by the suggestiveness of the quotations. Their Biblical contexts gave various ideas to the painter; they were not merely curiously appropriate Biblical quotations with which he labelled parts of the picture after it was painted, but were themselves responsible for the shaping of it. There are three particularly suggestive quotations of this sort, which may in themselves have been sufficient directly to inspire the composition; one might almost say that these three quotations could have provided sufficient motivation for the scene as a whole (the other two main elements of the composition, the central archetypal fool, and the moral of the memento mori, are inevitably present).

The quotation from Proverbs 7, 22, IN CVSTODIAM STVLTVS TRAHTVR [sic], ‘drawn into a jail like a fool’, in which custodia is to be understood in the concrete sense, ‘jail’, will have provided the artist with the notion of the cage of fools (though, curiously, the normal Vulgate reading here is ‘ad vincula stultius trahatur’, ‘drawn into bonds/chains like a fool’). Adjacent verses from the 21st chapter of Ecclesiastes provided two other main constituents of the composition, the fool who looks into the house from the window (verse 26), and the fool who listens behind the door (verse 27). STVLTTIA HOMINIS AVSCVLTATVR PER OSTIVM, ‘it is folly for a man to listen at the door’ (restoring the normal Vulgate reading, auscultare), is the inscription painted on the door itself, beside the fool who listens behind it and draws our attention to the fact by pointing at his ear. STVLTVS A FENESTRA RESPICIT IN DOMVM, ‘the fool looks from the window into the house’: indeed he does (together with his companion)—but he also speaks in French, and we consider the significance of his Nous sommes trois below.

Given that the Fool is the subject of the picture, the inscription directly above the head of the large centrally placed fool functions as a label, a sub-title perhaps: STVLTVS FACTVS EST OMNIS, ‘every man is made foolish’. This surely speaks to the universality of human folly, so that we need not think, as we smile at the ridiculous postures and antics of the fools depicted, that we are exempt from such foolishness ourselves. The index finger of his left hand points directly at his mouth and simultaneously at the appropriate quotation from Isaiah 32. 6: STVLTVS FATV[AV]S LOVETV, ‘the fool will speak foolish things’. Inscribed across his chest are the words COR FATVI QVASI VASI CONFRACTVM, ‘the fool’s heart is like a vessel broken in pieces’ (Ecclesiastes 21.17), and beside each of his feet, two further appropriate quotations, also from Ecclesiastes 21: PES FATVI FACILIS IN DOMVM PROXIMI, ‘the fool of the foot is soon in his neighbour’s house’, and COMPEDE IN COMPEDEBVS [sic] STVLTO DOCTRINA, ‘doctrine to the fool is like letters on the feet’. He has similarly—according to Proverbs 17.16—no use for riches, so beside his purse brimming with gold coins, the inscription rhetorically inquires QVID PRODEST STVLTO HABERE DIVITIAS CVM SAPIENTIAM EMERE NON POSSIT, ‘what use is it to the fool to have riches when he cannot buy wisdom?’

NOUS SOMMES TROIS. This is the only inscription in the vernacular—a fact which, in itself, demands explanation. And why is this statement included at all, despite having no Biblical authority? Meaning ‘We are three’ or ‘There’s three of us’, and placed between the two fools in the window, it is clearly intended to be spoken by one of them, presumably the fool on the left whose mouth is shown open as if speaking. His companion, whose mouth is closed, has his fingers placed in such a way as to convey puzzle—because even he knows they are only two! We might at first understand the statement to include the large standing fool, thus making three—though even if the fool who utters the words cannot see the multitude of fools behind the door, the large number of his fellows in the cage beneath him are visible to him, so they are many more than three. In fact, this is a traditional fool-joke, and several other representations of two fools who say ‘Nous sommes trois’ are known—but it is a joke at the viewer’s expense. By asking how they can possibly be three when they are plainly two, we make ourselves the third fool! Shakespeare was also familiar with this motif, referring to it in passing as ‘the picture of we three’ in Twelfth Night (1601). In fact, an English painting slightly later than ours depicting two fools captioned W3E Three Logerheads, ‘We three fools’, survives at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, and there are several late 16th-century French and German prints that testify to the European popularity of this visual joke.

STVLTORVM INFINITVS EST NVMERVS!

Malcolm Jones
IMPORTANCE OF FINDING A BALANCE
The Conservation of Penrhyn Castle’s Merryweather Fire Pump

It is always rewarding when a significant item is brought back to its original location at one of the National Trust’s properties, and especially when funds can be raised to support a programme of conservation to allow it to be displayed for the long term.

The Merryweather steam-powered fire pump from Penrhyn Castle, Gwynedd, came up for auction in 2009, and the National Trust acquired it with the support of a bequest from O. J. Bufton. The Merryweather was brought back to Penrhyn Castle as part of the collection of industrial equipment in the Penrhyn Castle Industrial and Railway Museum that is housed in the Castle’s extensive stable block. The objects in the museum include steam locomotives and other equipment associated with the Penrhyn quarry railway, but the Merryweather is the only major industrial item in the collection that is indigenous to the Castle.

Merryweather & Sons specialised in the production of steam pump fire engines, and they built small versions, capable of pumping about 100 gallons of water a minute, for use in country houses. The fire pump, a Merryweather Greenwich Gem model, was originally purchased to safeguard the Penrhyn estate in 1896. It was a horse-drawn vehicle and would have had a crew of seven, including the driver, to operate it.

Looking after an industrial item like the Merryweather can be a case of finding a good balance between the traditional engineering approach of regular maintenance, and the conservation principles of minimum intervention and prevention of deterioration. Display and storage areas such as the stable block at Penrhyn are difficult to adapt to provide the optimum environmental conditions to prevent corrosion of metal parts, or damage to wooden and leather components. There was no suggestion that the Merryweather fire pump would be restored to working order; rather, the objective was to stabilise it so that it could be put on long-term display so that visitors could see it in its original home.

The condition of the Merryweather fire pump was assessed by Tim Martin of Context Engineering Ltd, and a programme of conservation was developed. The People’s Postcode Lottery awarded Penrhyn a major grant to fund the conservation of the Merryweather, and to provide improved environmental control in a refurbished display area in a garage below the Brewhouse, where the fire pump was originally housed.

One of the most significant factors affecting the appearance and the condition of the Merryweather was a layer of grease that had been applied to many of the metal components, and appeared as thick green coating on the brass cladding on the boiler (see illustration, left); originally, this and other parts of the pump would have been polished. The coating was identified as a mineral grease, and pH measurement suggested it contained an acidic cleaning agent as an additive, which has resulted in the green corrosion within the grease.

The conservation work was carried out by Tim Martin, who undertook much of it at the Penrhyn railway museum in full view of visitors. The pump body was lifted onto stands by a gantry crane to allow access to the boiler and underside of the body. The pump and the pipework were dismantled, and the grease coating was removed using white spirit. Debris was removed from the...
interior, and the metalwork was coated with microcrystalline wax before it was reassembled.

The painted wood of the main body was also degreased with white spirit, and then coated in microcrystalline wax with the aim of protecting any original paint. Paint analysis carried out by Catherine Hassell indicated that although the fire pump had had a major repaint during its lifetime, the use of vermilion, red lead and lead white for this repaint suggests that it took place before 1940.

The rear axle of the fire pump had been damaged at some point, and was out of alignment so that the engine did not move in a straight line when on its wheels. To rectify this, the chassis was supported so that the bodywork, axle and spring could be removed. This consisted of eight separate leaves that had originally been riveted together with a single stud through the centre. This broken stud was replaced with an annealed steel pin and riveted back together to create a single unit again; the top of the stud was shaped to fit the hanging strap and to fit into a recess in the axle. This has solved the problem with the alignment of the brakes, as the axle is now at right angles to the body and will allow the fire engine to be pulled in a straight line.

Both front and rear wheels had suffered extensive damage and paint loss, possibly as a result of the problem with the rear axle. The wheels had been repaired and repainted in the past, and little or no original paint survived. To prevent further damage, the wheels were removed, and the two front wheels were repaired off site at Tim’s workshop, since hot works were needed. The old grease was removed from the hub using white spirit, and the wheels were re-lubricated with Comma plain grease and then re-assembled. The offside wheels were re-painted to protect the wood from environmental fluctuations.

The Penrhyn Merryweather fire pump is now on display back in its original home at Penrhyn, where it is easier to provide a basic level of environmental control than in the vast stable block, and where the role of this steam fire pump in protecting Penrhyn Castle from fire in its heyday is explained to visitors.

Siobhan Watts, Conservator, North Wales Hub, Erddig
Tim Martin, Context Engineering Ltd

The National Trust Historic Houses and Collections Annual 2015
Published in association with Apollo Magazine
Editor: David Adshead

JANE EADE and DAVID TAYLOR examine the surviving copies of Hans Holbein the Younger’s lost group portrait of Sir Thomas More’s family and their attribution to Rowland Lockey.

CHRISTOPHER ROWELL explores the furniture and decorative woodwork made by Thomas Donaldson for Attingham Park.

JONATHAN YARKER considers the Gothic chapel created by William John Bankes for his rooms at Trinity College, Cambridge.

PETER MOORE examines a John Wootton canvas at Knole.

WILL HAWKES explores Sanderson Miller’s transformation of the Great Hall at Lacock Abbey.

PETE SMITH examines the design of the New Hall at Hardwick.

286 x 220 mm, paperback. £5.95
To buy a copy please contact claire.forbes@nationaltrust.org.uk
PROTECTING HEARTH AND HOME?
Evil averting marks at Avebury Manor in Wiltshire

Avebury Manor is a small stone-built manor house in Wiltshire, immediately to the west of the well-known prehistoric henge monument at Avebury. There is evidence that construction of the existing house began in the 1550s, with a large south-facing wing added around 1600. The house has changed hands many times, mainly between owners who belonged to the gentry, and has at times been wholly or in part tenanted.

A large number of dates, symbols and letters are carved in the stone of the Manor; some are probably personal graffiti, but some seem likely to have been intended as apotropaic (evil-averting). The identification of apotropaic marks in domestic contexts, farm buildings, churches, and even caves has become increasingly common over the last twenty years; a picture is emerging of their having been in widespread use, although the dating of this activity remains ill-defined. The lack of contemporary records concerning such marks means that their apotropaic nature has to be inferred from their location and frequency. In terms of National Trust properties, marks at both Ham House and Knole have been highlighted in recent years. Although some marks had been identified in previous work at Avebury it is only recently that a full record has been made.

Many of the likely apotropaic marks at Avebury Manor take the form of letters which have been identified by the independent researcher Timothy Easton as representing the Virgin Mary. Two of the commonest are conjoined Vs (looking like W, and also inverted to look like M) representing Virgo Virginum, ‘Virgin of virgins’. Both are often found combined with R, suggesting Regina, ‘Queen (of Heaven)’. Avebury Manor has W as crossed Vs, and M and MR (Maria Regina). This category may also include RR for Regina Reginarum, ‘Queen of queens’, which occurs at Avebury. There are other marks at Avebury which elsewhere have been suggested as having been intended to invoke Christian protection, although there is more debate about these: such marks include I (for Jesus), P (perhaps for peace) and A (perhaps Ave or alpha). A mark not noted elsewhere is an inverted N, found at Avebury, but also seen in multiple examples at Bradford on Avon Tithe Barn (author’s observation), all of which are below openings in the walls, a typical position for apotropaic marks (the Barn is famous for its many ‘daisy wheel’ apotropaic symbols; see below). N the correct way up is found widely elsewhere as a single letter; one possibility might well be that it stands for noster, ‘our’ (as in ‘Our Lord’ or ‘Our Father’), though the reason for inversion of the letter is not clear. If all these are accepted as apotropaic, then ‘protected’ locations within the Manor are reasonably widespread: the South Porch and door, the South Library south window, the Tudor Bedroom fireplace and south window, and a first floor bedroom (Volunteer Room).

It is striking that Avebury Manor lacks the ‘daisy wheel’ compass-drawn mark (with one miniature and late exception on wood), which is one of the commonest apotropaic marks known. There is, however, a single occurrence of a double circle enclosing a dot (on the front door surround), which does appear elsewhere, and some apparently abortive compass-drawn marks around a fireplace on the first floor in a high-status room with decorated fire-surround and elaborate plaster ceiling. Other symbols include a chequer and a ladder motif around the same fireplace. A chequer was also one of the marks which were found by a fireplace at Knole in a room prepared for James VI and tree-ring dated to 1605-06. Finally, the house has several examples of the ‘butterfly cross’, some with a dropped side, commonly found elsewhere.

All the Avebury marks are in accessible places, and so could have been added at any time after construction, but there are one or two hints at chronology. The concentric circle and dot design beside the front door is a case in point, as the design is very faint and appears to be overlain by the letters IE, which are cut deeper...
and appear fresher. A single circle and dot in Avebury church tower appears to be overcut with the date 1591, perhaps suggesting that the circle and dot was an early form of mark here. Another two potentially early marks are in a first-floor room where an early fire surround carries two Ms, both very faint; it appears to have been plastered over when a later fire surround was introduced around 1700. The same room produced a 16th-century jeton (a token used in accounting) from the plaster of the ceiling, perhaps suggesting that both these occurrences were 16th-century instances of protection (although jetons are unrecorded as protective devices, coins do seem to have been used apotropaically). The only other possible indications of chronology are inscribed dates themselves. These cluster very markedly around the period 1712-22, and are particularly prominent around the main entrance, the South Porch; many seem to be inscribed in similar ways to the potentially apotropaic marks.

The location of marks at Avebury is typical of other apotropaic marks, in that doors, windows and fireplaces are the most common locations, presumably the places where evil was thought most likely to gain entry to the house. In some cases the replacement of surfaces has meant that marks cannot be expected, but enough of the early fabric survives to provide some locational detail. One feature which does appear to emerge is that some directions were seen as more in need of protection than others. The south entrance, for example, has many marks, but the east entrance none, despite having original stonework; the south-facing window of a former service room (the South Library) has several, but the west-facing window none; the south-facing window of the Tudor Bedroom has a butterfly cross, but the east and west windows have nothing.

A final curiosity of the house is the question of whether the owners colluded in the ‘protection’ of the house, turned a blind eye, or were even at times the creators of the marks. The South Door and Porch are covered in marks and dates to a degree which could not have been overlooked. Around the times of the inscribed dates, the early 18th century, the house was largely used by tenant farmers, but the owner, Sir Richard Holford, visited and stayed every summer. Although there are traces of filler in the marks and the porch appears to have been limewashed, the work would have to have been done annually to disguise it from the owner. Elsewhere in the house, particularly in the Tudor Bedroom, it seems that marking the mantelpiece was acceptable, as modern limewash has not fully covered the marks and would presumably not have been done in the past either.

It has only been possible to give a brief glimpse here of the variety of apotropaic marks made by the occupants, and perhaps owners, of this house. The range of marks and of the places ‘protected’ hints at a complex practice, perhaps followed over a considerable period of time. A thorough study of the marks is in progress, and it is hoped to publish a fuller interpretation shortly.

Rosamund Cleal, Museum Curator, Alexander Keiller Museum, Avebury

---

2 Some marks were identified by Dorothy Treasure in her NT Vernacular Building Survey in 1991, and further marks were recorded by Wessex Archaeology (Bob Davison and Anne Upson) in 2011.
4 For example Richard Taylor, *How to Read a Church*, Rider Press 2003 for a discussion of letters representing Christian meanings, including N.
5 Recognised by House Assistant Michele Drisse during cleaning.
THE GEOLOGICAL GALLERY AT BIDDULPH

The new science of geology contextualised by religion

In May 2015 Edgar Nernberg discovered a fossilised fish in Alberta. The discovery was hailed by Canadian palaeontologists as the most important specimen found in decades; they believed it to be 60 million years old. Nernberg considered the significance differently. He saw it as further proof that the Biblical stories of creation and Noah’s flood are true, and initially hoped to display it at the creationist Big Valley Creation Science Museum.

Debates of science versus religion are nothing new; a famous example is the debate in 1860 between Wilberforce and Huxley over Charles Darwin’s The Origin of Species. The issue is a complicated one, and to try to simplify it does not do the subject justice; we can see this in the new research on the origins of and the motivations behind the creation of the Geological Gallery at Biddulph Grange Garden, Staffordshire. Our research has found that the Gallery was an effort to harmonise theology and science in order to understand both better.

On 20 August 1862 the Geological Gallery at Biddulph Grange was opened to the public. A bazaar was held to raise funds for another of owner and plantsman James Bateman’s projects: the completion of a local church on Biddulph Moor. Rare silk worm specimens were displayed on a Dilanthus in the Orangery, cream teas were available for a small price, and Mr Bateman himself manned the bookshop.

The Gallery, a long hall over 100 feet long and separated into bays, contained a series of fossil specimens presented with rock strata; above each bay the relevant day from the story of creation in Genesis was inscribed.

The Geological Gallery at Biddulph Grange Garden has long been seen as a curiosity, and Mr. Bateman as an elusive figure, beyond his roles as a champion of the orchid and creator of the beautiful gardens at Biddulph. However, a new research project has discovered important evidence about the Gallery, and allowed the restoration project to continue with confidence now that we know more about the motivation for the building.

Research into James Bateman and the Gallery began in January 2015. It soon became clear that the archives at Biddulph Grange were limited. Research into Bateman and his associates had taken place in the past, but this work often took a botanical approach, overlooking Bateman’s broader life and interests. Thus a chronological approach to Bateman was made in an attempt to understand him in a wider context, and also to discover the origins of his geological interests. The results have been mixed, raising many more questions, but also demonstrating that Bateman was a man of passion and commitment in more than just botanical circles.

James Bateman’s education was unusual for a member of the landed gentry. Men of his background felt no obligation to sit for an honours degree, but in 1829, at the age of 17, Bateman matriculated from Lincoln College, Oxford and on the very same day moved to Magdalen College, where he remained for four years, achieving a Fourth Class Honours in Classics. Geology, along with such subjects as botany, philosophy, mineralogy, chemistry and physics were all peripheral subjects available for study during the Classics degree during this era, so looking into Bateman’s interests seemed a logical approach. Oxford University Natural History Museum held the most promising lead: the lecture lists for William Buckland, the pre-eminent geologist of his time, who lectured at Oxford during Bateman’s stay there. Buckland’s work included ground-breaking interpretations of Genesis, and a new understanding of the word ‘beginning’. He hypothesised that it meant an undefined period between the origin of the earth and the creation of its current flora and fauna, during which a long series of extinctions and successive creations of new kinds of plants and animals occurred. Such notions clearly influenced the Gallery which was to be created thirty years later.

The lecture attendance account books give the complete lists of attendees for the short series of lectures given quarterly by Buckland—the entirety of the geology course at this period. They make it absolutely clear that Bateman did not attend any of the geology lectures given at Oxford during his time there. This evidence, supported by a letter from Bateman giving away a small fossil collection from his youth to a friend who had been present at Buckland’s lectures, demonstrates a clear lack of interest in the subject. Rather, it was botany that was central to Bateman’s life, as his letters show. His interest in the subject reached its peak in 1837 with the publication of his The Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala; acceptance into the Royal Society soon followed.

Our investigation next moved on to Bateman’s busy social life, concentrating in particular on his involvement in various religious and philanthropic organisations. Private publications, newspaper articles and private letters all pointed towards the importance of Bateman’s personal interpretation of the Christian faith. This, of course, was not out of the ordinary for a man of his era. His willingness to use his social standing to promote Protestant teaching and warn against the perceived threat of Catholicism resulted in regular public appearances. Bateman was vehemently opposed to the Oxford Movement (also known as the Tractarian Movement from its Tracts for the Times, published from 1833 to 1841); this movement argued for the older Christian traditions to be adopted into Anglicanism, and it eventually developed into Anglo-Catholicism.
From 1845 onwards Bateman became increasingly vocal about the church and education. The leading Tractarians were from Oxford University, and Bateman had achieved his degree specifically in order to vote against their proposals. He also wrote on the subject and lectured on the threat of Tractarianism—his deep-seated opposition informed many of his public speeches and publications. He also joined the National Club, an organisation that sought 'to oppose a Catholic revival in all walks of life, to defend Protestant principles and raise the social condition of the people'. Bateman's religious grounding was a driving force behind his work; he was regularly involved in philanthropic causes, he defended Protestantism within education, and he became a local lay preacher. He also believed strongly that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. This conviction is presumed to be the motivation for his promulgation of what he considered to be the correct Christian teachings.

This evidence was enlightening, but where was the geology? Once again the evidence was sparse; however, the religious context was vital, for it was through religion that Bateman's engagement with geology began, as we found out when we looked at the reports of his public lectures in local newspapers.

Bateman began to lecture on the theories of Hugh Miller in Stoke-on-Trent in 1857. He also lectured in the Isle of Man (he often went there for the benefit of his wife's health). The lectures, entitled 'Genesis and Geology Compared', are the only direct evidence of Bateman's interest in geology, and the newspapers' description of them refer directly to Miller's theories. The lectures were accompanied by drawings by Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, most famous for his creation of lifesize models of on dinosaurs alongside Professor Richard Owen at Crystal Palace.

Hugh Miller was a fiery-haired, blue-eyed Scotsman who had developed geological theories that attempted to synthesise new scientific understanding with religious beliefs. Based in Cromarty, Miller re-interpreted the story of creation as epochs of time corresponding to geological research. Miller correlated the Biblical days of creation with fossils and stratigraphy to support his claims. It is important to understand that Miller was not trying to use geology to disprove religion, but to comprehend a relatively new science better by harmonising it with the word of God.

We found the link between these lectures and the Gallery in its description in a report on the inaugural outing of North Staffordshire Field Club in 1865, of which Bateman was a founding member. The Gallery is described as having been created 'in conformity with the theories of Hugh Miller'. The description of Bateman's lectures also correlates with the design of the gallery, designed as it is in bays representing the days of creation and geological epochs. The involvement of Benjamin Waterhouse Hawkins, who made diagrams and illustrations to accompany Bateman's lectures, raised for us the tantalising possibility that these drawings informed the Gallery's design. Hawkins's link with the garden is already known: Bateman became aware of his role in the geological exhibits at the Great Exhibition, and later commissioned him to create a number of sculptures that are still at Biddulph today. However, despite searches in both UK and American archives, we found no drawings by him made for Bateman, so to date there is no evidence on who designed the Gallery.

Our research had uncovered the motivation for the Geological Gallery. Its designer and the precise date of its creation became the next major questions for us, and despite an exhaustive search they remain unanswered. One other question has been answered, however: what was originally at the truncated end of the Gallery? This end was removed in 1928 when a hospital wing was built, and in the past the theory was that a bay for the seventh day of creation stood there. But the descriptions of the Gallery stated that it contained 'seven bays, and six days'—the first bay represented the period of chaos prior to creation—demonstrating that the missing part of the building formed no more than the exit from the Gallery. This also correlates with Miller's theories: he only broached the subject of the first six days, as he considered the seventh the era of redemption yet to come. The precise form of the exit remains unknown, but discounting the seventh day was vital for an accurate restoration.

Our research into the Geological Gallery still goes on, but a clearer understanding of the structure is now possible. A direct reference to the Gallery by Bateman, or the location of a design by Hawkins, remain elusive. However, an important exemplar from the beginnings of a debate that still continues today is now better understood, and has proved that the gap between science and religion was not necessarily always considered absolute. Instead, the Gallery represents an understanding of the new science of geology contextualised by the word of God.
BUILDING BRIDGES AT CROOME PARK

The construction of a new eye-catching Chinese Bridge

It took the 6th Earl of Coventry nearly sixty years to create his park at Croome Court, Worcestershire, so much of which has now been exhumed from the intensive cereal production and commercial forestry of a later century. And yet the Earl, aided by Capability Brown’s engineering prowess, had himself had to wrest its fecundity and beauty from a morass.

When first completed, the Park’s eye catchers—rotunda, castle, grotto et al—and its shaped waters were as atoms in a molecule; a unit of arcadia flanked by the Malvern Hills. But until this summer, an important and early atom had long been missing—the humpback Chinese Bridge which once spanned its artificial river, but had rotted away nearly two hundred years ago.

In the summer of 1747, the Earl (then Lord Deerhurst) received a letter from his friend of student years at Oxford, Sanderson Miller, dilettante architect and improver of landscape. In it, Miller reported that he had recently heard from Mr Talbot of Lacock Abbey that his old friend’s ‘spirit of improvement’ was beginning to exert itself at Croome—and indeed it was. For by the following year, the 82 ft-wide artificial river was finished, and across it was the substantial white tower-supported bridge that dominates the mid-ground of Richard Wilson’s large painting depicting Croome Court’s distant south front. The Bridge was the work of an architect-carpenter and prolific author of design guides and manuals called William Halfpenny.

It is possible to study and delight in 18th-century copies of his many books, such as Ornamental Architecture in the Gothic, Chinese and Modern Taste (1768) and The Art of Sound Building, demonstrated in Geometrical Problems (1732) at the RIBA Library in Portland Place. Beginning with lengthily obsequious though charming dedications, many are inscribed too with their owner’s names—perhaps connoisseurs or jobbing builders of the mid-Georgian age. Croome’s Chinese Bridge features in Halfpenny’s more prosaically titled Improvements in Architecture and Carpentry of 1754, but only as a drawing in elevation with a reference to Croome and the Earl of Coventry. Though, of course, it was the proof we needed, indispensable for rebuilding, it was not, alas, enough on its own to begin work. We also needed to know how wide its carriageway was, and how its abutments worked. As with all informed conservation and reconstruction, the yang to the yin of desk-based research is thorough on-site archaeology. Consequently, an erstwhile Trust archaeologist already very familiar with Croome, Jeremy Milne, was commissioned to survey and dig opposite areas on either bank.

Though no easily discernible trace of the Chinese Bridge remained, successive estate plans do depict it quite clearly, so there was little doubt as to its position. Furthermore, and somewhat tantalisingly, when the river was dredged some years ago two oak timbers, similar in appearance to railway sleepers, but having tenons and mortices, were brought to the surface from the indicated position of the lost bridge.

Early estate plans show an avenue of trees leading to and from the bridge, and then east towards Capability Brown’s rotunda of c. 1756/7, or westwards to James Wyatt’s much later Panorama tower. Worthy of consideration now, and definitely of study in the future, is that the earliest map—James Doherty’s of 1751—pre-dates Brown’s rotunda. Croome’s archivist, Jill Tovey, has mooted...
we were surprised by the abutment’s quality, but we were more surprised by their 12ft width. With only Halfpenny’s elevation drawing to go by, were we now to assume that his bridge was a colossal twelve feet wide?

A carriageway this wide would have given the bridge Roman military proportions, and would have necessitated double towers to support it; all this seemed somehow improbable. Furthermore, and authenticity aside, it would have added massively to the cost of reconstruction. However, we are confident that authenticity was not compromised when it was decided that in all probability a 6ft-wide carriageway sat centrally on the abutments.

A greater conundrum surrounded the treatment of the excavated abutments. Once recorded, could they merely be consolidated, or do they have original planes in them? It was decided that this probably would not be sound engineering practice; but there were doubts, too, about the archaeological ethics of removing them to create new footings in their place.

Another complicating factor was the extremely close proximity of two plane trees to the bridge’s western access. While the 1751 Doherty plan shows the avenues mentioned, later plans do not, but they do depict a pair of broadleaf trees there. It is widely known that Capability Brown liked plane trees, but it is hard to tell if this pair is indeed that old. Resorting to empirical methods, I embraced the 18th-century planes in Berkeley Square on a spring evening, and found Croome’s perhaps wanting in years. But trees grow at different rates depending on location; and even if this pair did post-date the Earl and Brown’s landscaping partnership at Croome, we still did not wish to lose them, or even risk fatally damaging their roots during our works to recreate the bridge’s abutments.

So, in the hope of never being afraid of a common-sense solution, it was decided to build the new bridge 14 feet south of the original, thus leaving a two-foot gap between its old and new abutments. This meant that once recorded the excavated abutments could be reburied, and the planes left unharmed. New abutments were then constructed and clad in Stoke Ground Base Bed, the closest matching Bath stone to that of the original abutments, as well as that used on the Court.

With much work already done, but little physical evidence to show for it, our project engineer, Ed Morton of the Morton Partnership, helped us interview potential contractors. We chose the Hampshire-based Green Oak Carpentry Company (GOC), partly because we liked a bridge they had built across the Grand Union Canal at Ealing, though I have always been delighted, too, by Edward Cullinan’s Gridshell which GOC created at the Weald & Downland Museum. But whereas the amorphous Gridshell is at the interface of timber construction and computer modelling, our Chinese Bridge was to be, as far as all practicable, tradition—made of oak—morticed, tenoned and pegged—eschewing all steel and synthetic materials.

Its oak, alas, could not be sourced in England, but had to come from the forests of Normandy. It had been hoped that it might be supplied by the Trust’s estates at Croft and Calke, but they only had smaller pieces, or scantlings, and not the great lengths and sections required for the bridge’s immense carriageway beams.

The supporting towers, which are sunk into the bed of the artificial water level of the artificial river. Instead, it was felt expedient to use greenheart, a South American timber, for the submerged towers. This is extremely durable, and generally favoured now for all marine work. Although obviously designed to a rather higher specification, Captain Scott’s RRS ‘Discovery’ was in fact built from greenheart in order to withstand the crushing pressure of the Antarctic ice.

The bridge was largely pre-fabricated in GOC’s workshops—its huge members laid flat across the ground and trial pegged—before being delivered to Croome, and great wood pegs were then driven through its tenons in the final act of assembly.

Soon the access road created for the crane, digger and lorries will be grassed over again and become imperceptible; and just perhaps by the end of next summer, when the bridge’s bare oak has been painted with an off-white linseed emulsion, the Chinese Bridge will be an indistinguishable latecomer in the restoration of this small piece of arcadia flanked by the Malvern Hills.

In the meantime, I would like to express the gratitude of all those involved to the trustees of the late Simon Sainsbury’s 1985 Settlement for funding this marvellous project.

Simon Chesters-Thompson, Curator, Midlands
The friendship between Harold Nicolson, polymath co-creator with Vita Sackville-West of Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent, and Lord Berners, the eccentric English composer, painter and writer, was in many ways a curious one. Their association was sustained over many years of mutual admiration and respect, but there appears simultaneously to have been a rivalry and a sense of friction that could have undermined it. A previously unknown letter by Berners that has surfaced in the book-cataloguing project at Sissinghurst may be interpreted in the context of this relationship; it may also reveal important information about its author and his encounters with the Third Reich.

Gerald Tyrwhitt-Wilson, 14th Baron Berners was one of the most diverse and innovative British composers of the early 20th century, but he is probably better known now as a social aesthete and eccentric, the subject of recent biographical studies by Peter Dickinson and Mark Amory. He also features alongside his lover, Robert Heber-Percy, in Sofka Zinovieff’s The Mad Boy, Lord Berners, My Grandmother and Me (2014).

It is the knowledge of his mischievous sense of humour and love of practical jokes that partly informs our reading of the letter he sent to Harold Nicolson on 24 September 1935 from his home at Faringdon House, Oxfordshire. This letter emerged recently, found enclosed within a rare surviving copy of the first edition of Berners’s privately circulated novel The Girls of Radcliff Hall (1932). Unsurprisingly, it is an odd book. The title plays upon the pseudonym of the author of the notorious banned lesbian novel The Well of Loneliness (1928); Berners uses a nom de plume of his own, Adela Quebec. While it appears to be a lightly suggestive parodic schoolgirl tale in the style of Angela Brazil’s works, it is actually a roman à clef that sends up the affairs of Berners’s gay male contemporaries and friends, their loves, intrigues and jealousies. Amongst others, the character of Cecily is based on the photographer Cecil Beaton, Olive is based on the stage-designer Oliver Messel, and the headmistress, Miss Carfax, is Berners himself. Though the tale was finally made publically available when it was re-printed in 2000, the first edition is a rare survivor, purportedly because those targeted by Berners’s spoof (Beaton in particular, suggests Mark Amory) tried to get much of the limited print run destroyed. The story greatly depends for its humour on one’s knowledge of the lives of the parodied social circle, but it is undoubtedly a fascinating period piece.

The copy belonging to Harold Nicolson is inscribed by Berners: ‘… with love from the author/Sept 1935’. It survives in Nicolson’s study in the South Cottage at Sissinghurst as part of his personal library, which forms, along with the books of Vita Sackville-West, one of the largest National Trust collections and one of the most significant 20th-century libraries in the Trust’s portfolio. In the letter that accompanies the book, Berners expresses his wish that the tale will amuse Nicolson, who is evidently not one of the friends portrayed; he hopes that Nicolson may help him find a publisher in Paris for an edition to include illustrations by Berners’s Russian artist friend Pavel Tchelitchew. (Harold Nicolson was extremely well connected and may well have had contacts in the Parisian book world, though no such edition ever appeared.)

What is most revealing and even shocking in the letter is Berners’s account of the trip to Nazi Germany from which he had recently returned. Berners initially records a stay with Philip, Prince of Hesse, the Nazi governor of Hesse-Nassau. This would bring back memories to Nicolson of a sight-seeing excursion to Rome in 1921, when he travelled with Berners in his Rolls Royce along with Philip of Hesse, Gerry Wellesley, and Siegfried Sassoon. The pair had many shared acquaintances going back to a period before the First World War, when both held posts at the British Embassy in Constantinople; they overlapped there only for a short period, but for long enough to establish a lifelong friendship. Nicolson’s first biographer James Lees-Milne describes a visit by Berners to Nicolson in Berlin; he gives a generous account of Lord Berners’s appeal, his liberal cynicism and sheer fun. ‘He was the most appreciative of guests as well as the most amusing. He was never bored and he...
Berners did indeed meet Adolf Hitler, it has never been confirmed by his biographers. Diana Mosley (then Guinness and born Mitford) would surely have known, and she denied it in her interview with Peter Dickinson. The letter has the ring of truth, however, and it does not appear to be one in which Berners is teasing Harold. Or perhaps he is playing a game of political one-upmanship with his friend, claiming to have met the Nazi leader at a time when he was the talk of the world, but before the full horror of the Nazi regime was known. Berners himself was politically naïve, and is unlikely to have had any real Fascist sympathies. He may have just been impressed with the Nazis, like many in the British aristocracy at that time, for their stance against Communism. Nevertheless, it brings a shudder to the modern reader to see Adolf Hitler described as a ‘sweet little man’.

Lord Berners continues his account of his German trip with the following passage: ‘I then went on to Munich where I met Hitler under Diana Guinness’s auspices. He is really a sweet little man with great personal charm and the most persuasive blue eyes.’ Berners goes on to tell Nicolson that the only reason he did not attend the Nuremberg rally was the risk of ‘extreme bodily discomfort’ from getting up early and listening to speeches. If Berners did indeed meet Adolf Hitler, it has never been confirmed by his biographers. Diana Mosley (then Guinness and born Mitford) would surely have known, and she denied it in her interview with Peter Dickinson. The letter has the ring of truth, however, and it does not appear to be one in which Berners is teasing Harold. Or perhaps he is playing a game of political one-upmanship with his friend, claiming to have met the Nazi leader at a time when he was the talk of the world, but before the full horror of the Nazi regime was known. Berners himself was politically naïve, and is unlikely to have had any real Fascist sympathies. He may have just been impressed with the Nazis, like many in the British aristocracy at that time, for their stance against Communism. Nevertheless, it brings a shudder to the modern reader to see Adolf Hitler described as a ‘sweet little man’.

When his old friend died in 1950 Harold Nicolson wrote Lord Berners’s obituary for The Spectator in affectionate terms. He wrote that ‘his patrician qualities showed themselves in something more than contempt for vulgarity; they showed themselves in delicate consideration for the feelings of the friends he teased.’

If Harold had ever been taken aback by the mischievous humour of his old friend and rival, it was clearly forgiven. Yet history casts a long shadow over the moment in their lives revealed in this newly discovered letter, whether it is true or whether it is another of Berners’s teases.

Harvey James, Library Cataloguer

‘The Girls of Radcliff Hall’ inscribed to Harold Nicolson by the author

Harold Nicolson with Vita Sackville-West outside South Cottage, Sissinghurst