

Anonymous

The following account of Pope's own garden just three years after his death appeared in *The General Magazine* of Newcastle in January 1748; it was discovered and published by professor Maynard Mack some years ago. The letter speaks admirably for itself, especially if read in conjunction with the plan of Pope's garden (Plate 81) published by his gardener, John Searle. What Pope created for his retreat at Twickenham from 1719 onwards became something of a legend by his death, and the pilgrims and tourists visiting the garden and grotto (from which vandals began to prise the geological specimens as souvenirs) steadily increased. The visitor from Newcastle is, happily, more discriminating and provides a knowledgeable and sensitive description. Pope's house was torn down in 1807 by Baroness Sophia Charlotte Howe, who is said to have been incensed by the stream of visitors; the grotto (Plate 82) alone survives today, a sad remnant of what so delighted this visitor in 1747.

'An Epistolary Description of the Late Mr. Pope's House and Gardens at Twickenham' (1747)

THO' now I have liv'd in *London* two Months, I have not been able to steal more than one Day from constant Attendance to the Business which brought me up; but that however, was made a most pleasant one, by an entertaining Ramble into the Country along with a few agreeable Companions. Nothing can excel the fine Views and Scenes about this great Town: Every Thing within the Compass of Art and Nature is carried to the highest Pitch: The Hills and Lawns, Woods and Fields, are cultivated and displayed to the utmost of Skill and Industry; and such a Multitude of elegant Seats and Villas rising on all Sides, amaze a new Spectator with their various Design and Gradeur. But it is not my present Purpose to entertain you with a general Description of this rich Country: I have a Particular in view, that I know will be infinitely more acceptable to your Taste and Curiosity. We set out early in the Morning, and made choice of the Road along the South Banks of the *Thames*, which leads to *Richmond*, where we proposed to bait; but arriving there before Noon, we found Time enough upon our Hands to ride up as far as *Twit'nam* and return to Dinner. You will instantly guess our Intention was to visit the Residence of the late Mr *Pope*: This indeed was our Design; and as we approach'd it, I could not help being agitated, with a kind of glowing Ardour, flutt'ring at my Heart, often revolving these Lines,

"Come let us trace the matchless Vale of *Thames*,
"Fair winding, where the Muses us'd to haunt,
"In *Twit'nam's* Bowers, and for their POPE implore
"The healing God." ---

They are a little alter'd, from *Thompson's* Seasons; and you who know how infinitely fond I am of Mr *Pope's* Poetry, will not wonder at my being seiz'd on this Occasion, with a Glief of Enthusiasm; nor that I tell you I enter'd the Gardens with a warm Offering of Respect and Reverence. And now, Sir, I will give you the best Description of the Place that I can draw from the cursory View which our Time allow a us to take of it.

Twickenham is a delightful Village, situated about a North Country Mile above *Richmond*, on the opposite Side of the River. Mr *Pope's* House stands in the South-west End of the Village; the Area of the Ground is a gentle Declivity most agreeably sloping to the *Thames*, which here exactly answers *Denham's* inimitable Description of it.

"Tho' deep yet clear, tho' gentle yet not dull;
"Strong without Rage, without o'erflowing full.

Between the River and the House ascends a Parterre or Piece of Grass, near Square; on the uppermost Verge of which is the House, fronting the River, and backing against the Wall of the high Road which leads thro' the Town of *Twit'nam*, and passes behind the House: On the other Side of this Road, still easily ascending further from the *Thames*, lie the Gardens, whose Bounds are of an irregular Form, not encompassed with Walls, but Hedges, containing (I think) not much over or under two Acres of Ground. This gives you a general Notion of the whole, and its Situation: and, to be more particular, I shall trace over as many of the Parts as occur to me, beginning again at the Bottom of the Plan, where the lingring *Thames* glides softly by, and washes the Margin of the green Parterre; at the Head of which, as it were niched into a rising Mound, or Bank, stands the House; not of so large or magnificent a Structure, as a lightsome Elegance and neat Simplicity in its Contrivance. It is at present neither inhabited nor furnished; but shut up and silent, as that great Genius which lately resided in it. The Sides of the Court, or Parterre, are bounded by deep Thickets of Trees, Hedges, and various Evergreens and Shrubs, ascending in a wild, but delightful Slope, beginning with these of the humblest Growth, and gradually rising, end with lofty Elms and other Forest Trees. This Grass plot is join'd to the Garden by a subterraneous Passage, or Cavern; which entering the House below the Middle of the Front, and passing cross under the high Road, opens into a Wilderness Part of the Garden. Over the Front Entrance into this Grotto lies a balustraded Platform, and serves the Building both as a Vestible and Portico; for a Balcony projecting from the middle Window of the second Story, and supported by Pillars resting upon the Platform, makes so much of it resemble a Portico; but the Platform extending without these Pillars, becomes more a Vestible: Add to this, the Window opening into the Balcony being crowned with a Pediment, gives the several Parts an Air of one Figure, or whole, and adds an inexpressible Grace to the Front. Mr *Pope*, you may observe, in a Letter to Mr *Blount*, says, that in forming the subterraneous Way and Grotto, he there found a Spring of the clearest Water, which fell in a perpetual Rill that eccho'd thro' the Cavern Day and Night: The Discovery of this rilling Fountain was a fortunate Accident to Mr *Pope* whose Taste was so admirably suited to give a Thing of that kind the happiest Turn of poetical Improvement; as you will presently see. The Grotto is an irregular Vault and Passage, open at both Extremities, and further illuminated by two Windows to the Front: In passing it along, we are presented with many Openings and Cells, which owe their Forms to a Diversity of Pillars and Jambs, ranged after no set Order or Rule, but aptly favouring the particular Designs of the Place: They seem as roughly hew'd out of Rocks and Beds of mineral Strata, discovering in the Fissures and angular Breaches, Variety of Flints, Spar, Ores, Shells, &c. among which the Stream issuing from the Spring of Water is distributed to a Diversity of Purposes: Here it urges in a gushing Rill thro' fractur'd Ores and Flints; there it drips from depending Moss and Shells; here again, washing Beds of Sand and Pebbles, it rolls in Silver Streamlets; and there it rushes out in jets and Fountains; while the Caverns of the Grot incessantly echo with a soothing Murmur of aquatick Sounds. To multiply this Diversity, and still more increase the Delight, Mr *Pope's* poetick Genius has introduced a kind of Machinery, which performs the same Part in the Grotto that supernal Powers and incorporeal Beings act in the heroick Species of Poetry: This is effected by disposing Plates of Looking glass in the obscure Parts of the Roof and Sides of the Cave, where a sufficient Force of Light is wanting to discover the Deception, while the other Parts, the Rills, Fountains, Flints, Pebbles, &c. being duly illuminated, are so reflected by the various profited Mirrors, as, without exposing the Cause, every Object is multiplied, and its Position represented in a surprizing Diversity. Cast your Eyes upward, and you half shudder to see Cataracts of Water precipitating over your Head, from impending Stones and Rocks, while saliant Spouts rise in rapid Streams at your Feet: Around, you are equally surprized with flowing Rivulets and rolling Waters, that rush over airy Precipices, and break amongst Heaps of ideal Flints and Spar. Thus, by a fine Taste and happy Management of Nature, you are presented with an undistinguishable Mixture of Realities and Imagery. In passing out of the Grotto we enter into a Wilderness, and have in view directly before us a Rotundo, or kind of Temple, entirely compos'd of Shells, and consisting wholly of a Cupola, or Dome, supported upon rustick Columns, so as to leave it open every Way to the surrounding Garden. From the Grotto to the Temple we ascend along a Walk in the natural Taste, being rather strew'd than pav'd with Flints and Pebbles, inclos'd with Thickets, and over-arch'd with wild and interwoven Branches of Trees[.]

From the Temple, this sylvan Arcade, together with the Passage of the Grotto, make a sort of continued Tube, thro' which a small Expanse of the *Thames* is beheld as in a Perspective, making a beautiful remote Appearance; where Vessels that pass up and down the River, suddenly glance on the Eye, and again vanish from it in a Moment. Before I lose Sight of the Grotto, I must not omit taking Notice of an Inscription from *Horace*, placed over the Entrance from the Garden.

--- *Secretum iter, et fallentis semita vitae.*

An *English* Translation of this, equally poetical, elegant, and concise, I think is hardly possible: By attempting it, I have greatly fallen short in the last respect,

A hid Recess, where Life's revolving Day,
In sweet Delusion gently steals away.

I would next give you some particular Idea of the Garden, but am afraid I shall fail most of all in this Part of my Attempt: for that free natural Taste, and unaffected Simplicity, which presides every where in the Plan, wanders so much from all common Forms and stated Fashions, that a Wood or a Forest doth not deviate much more from Rule: It is not here,

That --- Grove nods at Grove, each Alley has a Brother,
And half the Platform just reflects the other,
But --- Pleasing Intricacies intervene,
And artful Wildness to perplex the Scene.

Near the Bounds of the Garden, the Trees unite themselves more closely together, and cover the Hedges with a thick Shade, which prevents all prying from without, and preserves the Privacy of the interior Parts. These Wilderness-Groves are either Quincunces, or cut thro' by many narrow serpentine Walks; and as we recede from the Boundary and approach towards the Center, the Scene opens and becomes less entangled; the Alleys widen, the Walks grow broader, and either terminate in small green Plots of the finest Turf, or lead to the Shell Temple. The Middle of the Garden approaches nearest to a Lawn or open Green, but is delightfully diversified with Banks and Hillocks; which are entirely cover'd with Thickets of Lawrel, Bay, Holly, and other Evergreens and Shrubs, rising one above another in beautiful Slopes and Inter-mixtures, where Nature freely lays forth the Branches, and disports uncontroul'd; except what may be entirely prun'd away for more Decency and Convenience to the surrounding Grass-plots, for no Shear-work or Tonsure is to be found in all the Scene. Towards the South side of the Garden is a Plantation of Vines curiously disposed and dress'd; it adjoins the Wilderness, and is in the same Taste, but opener to the Sun, and with more numerous interveening Paths. Among the Hillocks on the upper Part of the open Area, rises a Mount much higher than the rest, and is composed of more rude and indigested Materials; it is covered with Bushes and Trees of a wilder Growth, and more confused Order, rising as it were out of Clefts of Rocks, and Heaps of rugged and mossy Stones; among which a narrow intricate Path leads in an irregular Spiral to the Top; where is placed a Forest Seat or Chair, that may hold three or four Persons at once, overshadowed with the Branches of a spreading Tree. From this Seat we face the Temple, and overlook the various Distribution of the Thickets, Grass plots, Alleys, Banks, &c. Near this Mount lies the broadest Walk of the Garden, leading from the Center to the uppermost Verge; where, upon the gentle Eminence of a green Bank, stands an Obelisk, erected by Mr *Pope* to the Memory of his Mother: It is a plain Stone Pillar resting upon a Pedestal: and the Plynth of the Pillar bears this Inscription on its four Sides, beginning with that which faces the Walk.

AH EDITHA !

MATRUM OPTIMA.

MULIERUM AMANTISSIMA.

VALE.

As this Obelisk terminates the longest Prospect of Mr *Pope's* Garden, it shall also put a Period to my Description; which is not of a Place that bears the high Air of State and Grandeur, and surprizes you with the vastness of Expence and Magnificence; but an elegant Retreat of a Poet strongly inspired with the Love of Nature and Retirement; and shews you, with respect to these Works, what was the Taste of the finest Genius that this or any other Age has produced. I cannot conclude my Epistle better, than with a few Lines from the great Master himself, which contain his own Remarks upon his Situation at *Twit'nam*.

To Virtue only and her Friends a Friend,
The World besides may murmur or commend.
Know, all the distant Din that World can keep,
Rolls o'er my Grotto and but soothes my Sleep.
There my Retreat, the best Companions grace,
Chiefs out of War, and Statesmen out of Place.
There ST JOHN mingles with my friendly Bowl,
The Feast of Reason, and the Flow of Soul.
And HE, whose Lightning pierc'd th' *Iberian* Lines,
Now forms my Quincunx, and now ranks my Vines:
Or tames the Genius of the stubborn Plain,
Almost as quickly as he conquer'd *Spain*.
Envy must own, I live among the Great,
No Pimp of Pleasure, and no Spy of State;
With Eyes that pry not, Tongue that ne'er repeats,
Fond to spread Friendships, but to cover Heats;
To help who want, to forward who excel,
This all who know me, know; who love me, tell;
And who unknown defame me, let them be
Scribblers or Poets, alike are Mob to me.

In South Sea Days not happier, when surmis'd
The Lord of Thousands, than if now excis'd:
In Forests planted by a Father's Hand,
Than in five Acres now of rented Land;
Content with Little, I can piddle here
On Brocoli and Mutton round the Year;
But ancient Friends (tho' poor, or out of Play)
That touch my Bell, I cannot turn away.
'Tis true no Turbots dignify my Boards,
But Gudgeons, Flounders, what my *Thames* affords.
To *Hounslow-Heath* I point, and *Bansted-Down*,
Thence comes your Mutton, and these Chicks my own:
From yon old Walnut Tree a Shower shall fall,
And Grapes, long-lingring on my only Wall ...
Fortune not much of humbling me can boast,
Tho' double-tax'd, how little have I lost?
My Life's Amusements have been just the same,
Before and after standing Armies came.

My Lands are sold, my Father's House is gone;
I'll hire another's; is not that my own ?
And your's my Friends ? thro' whose free opening Gate
None comes too early, none departs too late.
For I (who hold sage *Homer's* Rule the best)
Welcome the coming, speed the going Guest.
"Pray Heav'n it'last! (cries *Swift*) as you go on!
"I wish to God this House had been your own:
"Pity! to build without a Son or Wife:
"Why, you'll enjoy it only all your Life" . . .
Well, if the Use be mine, can it concern one,
Whether the Name belong to *P[o]pe* or *Vernon*?
What's Property? dear *Swift*! you see it alter
From you to me, from me to *Peter Walter* ...
Shades that to *Ba[co]n* could Retreat afford
Are now the Portion of a booby Lord:
And *Hemsley*, once proud *Buckingham's* Delight, '
Slides to a Scriv'ner, or a City Knight.
Let Lands and Houses have what Lords they will,
Let us be fix'd, and our own Masters still.