



THE HOLFORDS OF WESTONBIRT TRUST

PRESS NOTICE

Date:  
Embargo:

On Friday 31<sup>st</sup> October, the Chairman and Trustees of the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust will host the official public launch of the Trust at Westonbirt in Gloucestershire to raise money for vital restoration works to the house and its gardens.

To mark the launch, writer, historian, garden designer and Trust Vice-President **Sir Roy Strong** will give an address and unveil an impressive standing stone cut by **Richard Kindersley** in memory of **Robert Stayner Holford**, who created the House and Pleasure Grounds in the nineteenth century. This will be followed by a celebratory lunch.

The Holfords of Westonbirt Trust, whose Presidents are **Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales & the Duchess of Cornwall**, was established in 2006 by **Lady Bland and others**, strongly supported by the Governors of Westonbirt School and with encouragement from Westonbirt Arboretum. The Trust is independent of both but the three will work in partnership for the benefit of the house and its magnificent park and gardens.

For 80 years, the school has taken sole responsibility for maintaining Westonbirt, but concern for the decorative elements of the house and the structural elements of the gardens - affected by natural wear and tear over 160 years and now in need of costly restoration - has led to the establishment of the Trust, and the involvement of an eminent group of Patrons and Trustees.

The Trust is launching an appeal for £2.7m of financial support for this conservation work, which is so urgently needed to prevent further deterioration and to restore many of the state rooms and formal gardens of Westonbirt to their former glory. Help will be sought from major foundations and grant bodies and from private donations. The Trust will also apply to the **Heritage Lottery Fund**, in partnership with the Arboretum, for a grant to match the funding achieved by the appeal.

In 2007, following a major priming donation and to show what could be achieved with skilled and painstaking work, the Trust conserved the Holfords' Library. Now, an exact

copy of the cochineal red silk on the walls, a gilded ceiling, impressive pelmets and tooled leatherwork all combine to create a stunning restoration of the great room.

The remaining State rooms, the great central saloon and Lady Holford's bedroom, with its hand painted panels, are also suffering from wear and tear - fraying silk and worn velvet on the walls, cracking wood and fading paint. But the Trust is confident that they too can be brought back to their original state. The total cost for all this research and conservation work is expected to be £1.3 million.

A further £1.4 million is needed to complete the restoration of the Gardens and Parkland at Westonbirt, from the re-establishment of the ha-has to urgent stone repairs on the pavilions and fountains in the Italian Gardens.

The Trust has taken a 99 year lease on the Pleasure Grounds and plans to ensure that a wide range of visitors can enjoy their interest and beauty. Educational projects, designed in partnership with the Arboretum, will increase knowledge of the context in which Westonbirt was created and of the current collection of important trees.

Much remains to be done; guided by a team of experts and historians, the Trust hopes to continue this exciting project of conservation work as soon as possible, before the repairs become too costly and too severe.

**Lady Bland, Chairman of the Trust, said;**

*“My concern for the conservation of great architecture and landscape was nurtured by my school days at Westonbirt – one of the most stunning and important of Victorian houses. Even as a child I appreciated its quality and the beauty of its surrounding gardens and parkland.*

*“Despite the best efforts of the school over 80 years and the conservation work that has already been undertaken, time has taken its toll on the Westonbirt estate; there is much more to be done. If we do not get professional conservation underway immediately, then the cost of these urgent repairs will become prohibitive and some of Westonbirt's greatest assets could be lost forever.*

*“The Trust plans to increase tours of Westonbirt House and Pleasure Grounds so that the beauty of Westonbirt can be shared with a wider audience than has been possible previously. In this we will be working with the Arboretum.”*

**John Julius Norwich said;**

*“Westonbirt is a perfect example of something that England does better than any other country: the combination of a great house, garden and park.*

*“The cost of maintaining these historic houses, however, is becoming ever more expensive; now at last the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust promises to take over the burden*

*of maintenance and conservation at this magnificent house. The Trust is full of enthusiasm for the tasks ahead, and is already hard at work.*

*“It has set itself the highest of standards; if it receives the support it deserves, it will rapidly transform the whole estate, which – together with the National Arboretum nearby – will surely become a major attraction for the region.*

*“Here, in short, is a really exciting and worthwhile project; I endorse it with all my heart.”*

**Notes to editors:**

- Donations can be made through  
The Administrator  
The Holfords of Westonbirt Trust  
Westonbirt  
Tetbury  
Gloucestershire GL8 8QG
- Projected Cost of the works at Westonbirt:
  - House £1.3m
  - Pleasure Grounds and Parkland £1.4m
  - Total (2008 estimates) £2.7m
- **Presidents:**  
Their Royal Highnesses The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall

**Vice Presidents:**

The Duchess of Beaufort  
Lord Howick of Glendale  
Mr. Michael Stone D.L.  
Sir Roy Strong

**Patrons:**

Mr Henry Keswick, Mr James Joll, Sir Simon Jenkins, Mr James Hervey-Bathurst, Sir Max Hastings, Mr Michael Green, Mrs Charlotte Gere, Mrs Gilly Drummond, Lady Brittan, Mr Robin Benson, Mr David Holford Benson, Mr Lawrence Banks, Mrs Elizabeth Banks, Sir Humphry Wakefield, Lady Juliet Townsend, Professor Caroline Tisdall, Mr Charles Sebag-Montefiore, Lady Renfrew, Mr Thomas Pakenham, The Viscount Norwich, The Earl of Morley, Mrs Candida Lycett Green, Lady Arabella Lennox-Boyd, Mr Martin Lane-Fox, Lady Lucinda Lambton.

**Trustees:**

Lady Bland (Chairman), Lady Mary Keen, Dr Edward Impey, Mrs Mary Henderson, Mrs Antonia Filmer, Mrs Julie Clare, Miss Mary Burton, Mr Richard Boggis-Rolfe, Mr John Weir, Mr Simon Tomlinson, Mrs Annie Stone, Mr Andrew Sells, Mrs Annabella Scott, Mr Richard Marriott, Mrs Hilly McCallum.

**Consultants:**

Mr David Adams, Ms Jennifer Murray Band, Ms Bridget Bomford, Dr Sophieke Piebenga, Mr Peter Story

**Company Secretary & Administrator:**

Mrs Janice Malschuk

- The Westonbirt estate came to the Holford family by means of marriage in the middle of the seventeenth century. As Masters of Chancery based in London, they initially managed the estate as absentee landlords.

In the early nineteenth century **George Peter Holford** (d.1839) replaced the original manor with a Regency house. However, it was his son **Robert Stayner Holford** (1808-1892), who, backed by wealth from the original legal practice but especially from lucrative shares in the New River Company (which supplied London with fresh water), employed architect **Louis Vulliamy** to design and build, over ten years, this grand country house at Westonbirt in the later half of the nineteenth century. (Vulliamy had previously designed Dorchester House - his Park Lane residence – to house his great collections of paintings, sculpture, rare books and silver)

The gardens at Westonbirt had originally been laid out by his father **George Peter Holford** and the picturesque improver **William Sawrey Gilpin**. Upon inheriting the property in 1839, Robert Holford took on the task of enlarging the park and expanding the gardens, assisted by the landscape gardener **William Broderick Thomas** and the famous firm of **James Pulham & Son**. Planting large areas of woodland on previously arable ground, Robert Holford laid the bones for his extensive arboretum - which included the ancient Silkwood.

R S Holford was a scholarly collector of Old Masters, rare books, manuscripts, ceramics and silver. He was one of the most learned judges of quality in the country at a time when Art was becoming an important part of British cultural identity.

R S Holford married into an artistic family of collectors when he wed, in 1854, **Mary Ann Lindsey** (d.1901). They had three daughters, Margaret, Evelyn and Alice and one son, George.

**George Lindsey Holford** (1860-1926) together with his father, subscribed to international seed and plant collecting expeditions and were the creators of the now world-famous Westonbirt Arboretum. After his father's death, George continued to expand his father's tree collection.

As Equerry to various members of the Royal family, George spent much time at Court. He married Susannah Menzies (d.1943) but died childless, in 1926. Westonbirt passed to his nephew, the fourth Earl of Morley who sold off most of the estate but who retained the arboretum until his death in the 1950s when it was taken over by the Forestry Commission.

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