

THE HOLFORDS OF WESTONBIRT TRUST

PRESS RELEASE

THE BICENTENARY OF ROBERT STAYNER HOLFORD,
A GREAT VICTORIAN AND ONE OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S IMPORTANT LANDOWNERS

The bicentenary of the birth of Robert Stayner Holford, who established Westonbirt Arboretum, is to be marked with the planting of three new trees in the grounds of Westonbirt School.

Robert Stayner Holford was a Victorian Renaissance man; a scholarly connoisseur of the Arts, builder of two impressive houses, collector of old master paintings & objects of virtue, he amassed a superlative library of rare books & manuscripts and created the famous Arboretum of specimen trees, collected world wide. He inherited the Westonbirt estate from his father in 1839 and took on the enormous task of laying out the impressive Italian Gardens and Pleasure Grounds, expanding the park, starting the world-famous Westonbirt Arboretum, and eventually rebuilding the house - which is now Westonbirt School.

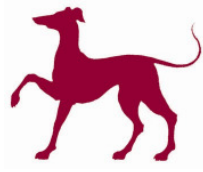
To commemorate the 200th anniversary of his birth, **The Holfords of Westonbirt Trust**, jointly with **Westonbirt School** and **the National Arboretum, Westonbirt**, will be holding a private tree planting ceremony in the school gardens.

This is a fantastic opportunity to bring together many of the Holford descendents who will join to celebrate the achievements of this eminent Victorian - who made Westonbirt his country home.

The tree planting will take place on
Wednesday 5th March 2008 at 1.30pm at Westonbirt School

“All those who have enjoyed the house and gardens at Westonbirt School or the world-famous Westonbirt Arboretum will want to celebrate the birth of an extra-ordinary man, Robert Stayner Holford, for whom they were the work of a lifetime and a dream achieved. Born 200 years ago, Westonbirt is his memorial – a place that has given pleasure to millions and will for many years to come,” said Lady Bland, Chairman of the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust.

Issued by The Holfords of Westonbirt Trust, the National Arboretum, Westonbirt and Westonbirt School.



NOTES TO EDITORS

Press are invited to attend the tree planting ceremony at Westonbirt School on Wednesday, March 5th at 1.30pm.

For details on how to attend this event please contact, **Janice Malschuk**,
Administrator of the Holfords of Westonbirt Trust on 01666 881372 or 07884166565, or email
admin@holfordtrust.com

❖ **Choice of Trees to be Planted**

One tree will be a Wollemi pine, a recent discovery of a 'fossil tree' in Australia which Holford, who was always keen to add the latest finds to his collection, would have planted were he alive today; one a *Quercus ilex*, evergreen oak, reputedly Mrs. Holford's favourite tree; and the third tree will be an *Acer cappadocicum*, the tree which Holford himself chose to plant on the occasion of his 80th birthday in 1888 – still going strong in the garden.

These three trees will mark the start of the regeneration and restoration of Holford's garden. They will be planted by a Holford descendent on behalf of the Trust and representatives from the School and the Arboretum.

❖ **Robert Stayner Holford (1808 - 1892)**

On 16 March 2008 it will be two hundred years since the birth of Robert Stayner Holford (1808-1892). It was he who, upon inheriting the Westonbirt estate from his father in 1839, set about laying out the gardens, expanding the park, starting the arboretum and rebuilding the house at Westonbirt (now Westonbirt School).

RSH was a Victorian gentleman and art collector with a great interest in trees. He amassed a huge and important art collection displayed in his two houses; Westonbirt was his country seat and his home in London, Dorchester House, was famous for its splendour and for its great collections of furniture, paintings and books.

His influence can still be seen in the area (Willesley, Beverston, Lasborough etc.) in the architecture of many former estate properties and also in the presence of large trees.

He married late in life, Mary Anne Lindsay, from a family steeped in art. They had three daughters and one son, George Lindsay Holford, who sadly did not produce an heir. George's three sisters married and had families. It is hoped that several of their grandchildren will come to the tree-planting celebration.

❖ **The Holfords of Westonbirt Trust**

This Trust has been founded recently with the purpose of restoring the house and the gardens at Westonbirt to something of their original splendour.

Meticulous research, expertise and skilled craftsmanship will combine to redecorate the palatial state rooms in Westonbirt House, to repair the stonework in the beautiful Italian Gardens and Pleasure Grounds and, with the involved support of the experts at the Westonbirt Arboretum, to maintain the great and important trees.

Large sums will have to be raised to cover this work.

The gardens are open to the public during the school holidays, and following the restoration works the house will be open more frequently.

❖ **Westonbirt School**

In 1928, following the death of Sir George Holford who had left no direct heir, Westonbirt House was bought by the Rev. Percy Warrington - for the foundation of a girls' boarding school. The same gentleman had previously bought other great houses, including Stowe and Canford, as boys' schools. The group are still united as 'The Allied Schools'.

This year Westonbirt will celebrate its 80th Birthday - with events at the school on May 10th.

Westonbirt School is now a very successful school with 240 girls, both Boarding and Day pupils - 11 to 18. Its Preparatory School, Querns at Westonbirt, has 100 pupils – both boys and girls from 4 - 11.

All the children at these schools benefit not only from the excellent academic and sports facilities at Westonbirt but from the exceptional beauty of the house, the gardens and the estate planned and built by Robert Stayner Holford 150 or so years ago.

❖ **Westonbirt - The National Arboretum**

The arboretum was established in the 1850s by Robert Stayner Holford and later developed by his son Sir George Holford. It was passed to the Forestry Commission in lieu of death duties in 1956.

In 2001 it gained the title of National Arboretum and is today renowned worldwide for its tree and shrub collection. The arboretum contains nearly 16,000 specimens, including almost half of those woody plants known to grow in the world's temperate climate zone, and covers 600 acres of beautifully landscaped grounds. Its importance is recognised by English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historical Interest as a Grade 1 registered Landscape.

Much of Westonbirt's renowned autumn colour is credited to the Holford's plantings of Japanese maples between 1875 and 1900, many of which are still alive today. Unlike many arboreta, Westonbirt is laid out according to aesthetic appeal rather than scientific or geographical criteria, and the Holfords' legacy is open for all to enjoy - a beautiful, relaxing and unique day out amongst some of the tallest, oldest and rarest trees and shrubs in Britain.

Westonbirt is home to the National Maple (Acer) Collection, with over 300 different types in the collection. The Forestry Commission opened Westonbirt Arboretum to the public in 1961, and in 1966 a new Acer Glade was established alongside the original one planted by Robert and George Holford in 1870. Today we are in the process of creating the world's best collection of maples. Visitor numbers to Gloucestershire's most visited 'paid-for' attraction are just under 350,000 per annum with a Friends' membership of over 22,000.

❖ **The Forestry Commission**

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible in England for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woods and forests and increasing their value to society and the environment. Forestry makes a real contribution to sustainable development, providing social and environmental benefits arising from planting and managing attractive, as well as productive, woodlands. Further information can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk

DIRECTIONS: Westonbirt School is three miles south west of **Tetbury** on the South side of the A433 (Tetbury to Bath Road). (The Westonbirt Arboretum is on the North side) It is 10 miles north-east of Junction 18 of the M4 and south-east of junction 13 of the M5.

NB: For only two dates in March, members of the public are able to book onto an exclusive guided tour through the house and pleasure gardens of the extraordinary Holford family. 'The Holford Heritage Tour' costs only £24 (including lunch and morning coffee) and is a full day of tours taking visitors through the family's history of innovation, foresight and extravagance. For more details, or to book please contact Helen Daniels on 01666 881200.