

Appeal to save Stowe landscape launched

An anonymous donor has stepped in to help the National Trust restore Capability Brown's landscape at Stowe in Buckinghamshire to its 18th-century glory.

Last year, work began on 54 urgent tasks, but more funding is needed to tackle crumbling statues, overgrown paths, the replanting of trees and the battered façade of the Temple of Friendship.

This is the third stage of a restoration project that began in 1989 when the Trust acquired the gardens. The generous benefactor has agreed to match pound for pound any public donations.

'I truly believe that Stowe has the potential to be one of Britain's most beautiful gardens again,' says head gardener Barry Smith, who's worked there for more than 30 years. 'It's a Herculean task, but with public support, I'm sure we can do it.'

To donate, visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe-appeal



Funding is needed to tackle crumbling statues and the replanting of trees in Stowe's park

Betjeman would have approved

THE sensitive restoration of two wall paintings by war artist Evelyn Gibbs (1905–91) has won this year's SPAB John Betjeman Award for church repair and restoration. The 1946 murals (*right*) depicting the Annunciation were discovered in the sanctuary of St Martin of Tours at Bilborough, Nottinghamshire; they had been 'lost'—covered with emulsion paint—during the building of an extension in the 1970s.

Although there was awareness of their existence, they were not rediscovered until 2009, when the church was rewired.

An anonymous donation of £1,000, which was dropped into the letter-box at the vicarage, made the project possible. Work began in September 2014—treating water damage, removing graffiti and matching paint colours—and the church was reopened on November 11, Armistice Day and the Feast of St Martin.

The award, a commemorative scroll of a John Piper print of a church that Betjeman loved, will be presented this month.



Flowers in her wake

A FORMER member of the Royal Artillery Reserves is walking the South West Coast Path, planting a sunflower for every one of the 616 British servicemen and women who were severely wounded during the Afghanistan conflict.

Jane McGill, who was injured during training for the Royal Artillery Gold Cup, is setting out on the non-stop trek in aid of Horseback UK (01339 880487; www.horseback.org.uk), which helps to rehabilitate soldiers with the help of horses.

She starts this weekend and will stop every mile or so to plant a sunflower, which symbolises hope and life as it keeps its face to the sun (www.just-giving.com/sunflowersfor-soldiers). *GH-T*



A walk to remember

THE 630-mile South-West Coast Path, from Minehead in west Somerset around Land's End to Poole Harbour, Dorset, is one of the UK's great walking challenges. The artist Sasha Harding decided to paint her way around as well and the result has been turned into a book, *A Brush with the Coast* (£30, www.sashaharding.co.uk). Accompanied by her Rhodesian ridgeback, Jess, a sketchbook and some occasionally unwanted companions, it took her 49 days. She is now vaguely contemplating tackling Wales's coastal path.

In the hot seats

Spirited debate should be guaranteed when former Defra Secretary Owen Paterson meets the energetic anti-grouse-shooting blogger Mark Avery on the first day of the CLA Game Fair at Harewood House, North Yorkshire (July 31–August 2). Their debate is entitled 'Landowners and Wildlife: Friends or Foes?' and will be at 2pm in the Strutt & Parker Theatre.

They will be joined by CLA member Philip Merricks, who runs the Elmley National Nature Reserve in Kent, and Ian Coghill, chairman of the GWCT. CLA vice-president Tim Breitmeyer will be chairman.

Adult tickets to the Game Fair, a field sports and shopping extravaganza, start at £25 (0844 6122 052; www.gamefair.co.uk).

Praise be! Churches get helping hand

ST MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS, Sapey, Herefordshire (*below*), has received a £40,000 grant from the National Churches Trust (www.nationalchurchestrust.org) for urgent repairs to its tower stonework, chancel, porch and nave floor. The Grade II*-listed church, which is on the Buildings at Risk Register, is one of 36 places of worship in the UK to benefit from a £607,000 handout from the trust.



Country Mouse Sightings to savour



I WAS lazily hoeing around the lavender, watching the bumblebees zip in for a feed, when my eye was caught by an altogether more impressive insect: a hummingbird hawk moth (*page 56*). This insect surpasses all others in the joy it brings, partially because it only appears on the longest, hottest days, but also for its habit of returning to a favoured plant or border day after day; it is a most welcome guest from overseas. The brown, fluffy, golden blur hovers beside a plant before planting its long proboscis into the flower to seek out the nectar. W. H. Hudson wrote about 'the high honour and distinction on the fortunate beholder' and Virginia Woolf admired its 'tremulous ecstasy' when feeding. Known also as a merrydance-a-pole, it is a summer treasure.

During the past week, I have also seen three live hedgehogs—these days, even a dead one on the road is noteworthy. Their population has been devastated from about 30 million in the 1950s to fewer than a million today. They are losing out to their only predator, the badger, whose population has soared over the same period. Forty years ago, my father stopped his car to show me a dead badger; last week, I stopped my car so that my children could see a live hedgehog. How the times have changed. **MH**

Town Mouse Marvels of Masterpiece



I LEFT Masterpiece with my head spinning. Every sort of desirable artwork or bibelot was on offer: Thracian coins, Sèvres vases, illuminated manuscripts, Aboriginal paintings, anatomical models, mahogany furniture, diamonds to delight even Marilyn Monroe's Lorelei Lee. It may be that the auction price of contemporary works continues to defy gravity, but plenty of money seems left for other styles of collecting. What, I wondered somewhat academically, could I live with most comfortably at home? There was a lovely fragment of an Egyptian head that would have sat happily on my desk, making me forever wonder what the whole figure would have been like.

So many marvels—and one more as I made for the exit. There was the Savills stand, where they gave me a pair of goggles to try Horoma—neither a dance nor a foodstuff, but a 'bleeding edge, real property visualisation solution'. In the manner of a video game, it enables you to walk through a building (in this case, a country house called Furze Croft) without actually being there: you go wherever you look, up into the air for a view of the roof if you want to. Only don't look down: they've left out the floor, so you feel as if you're standing at the edge of a cliff. I did say that my head spun. **CA**