

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'B'

HISTORIC/CONTEXTUAL BACKDROP

(1) John Scott and the 18th Century Grotto

According to Perman's (1991; 1995) "A New Guide to Scott's Grotto", John Scott was an eighteenth century Quaker poet who was best known for his liberal prose, often concerned with the Poor Law and Vagrancy Acts. He was born in Bermondsey in 1731 and moved to Amwell End, Hertfordshire, in 1740. Scott's poems can be found in various collections up until the early nineteenth century.

It is unclear when exactly Scott built his grotto, but it reflected the English fashion for grotto-building that began in the seventeenth century. Perman attributes Scott's motivations for the construct to his fashion and his desire to make his garden as attractive as possible; his love of solitary life and writing in peace; and his desire to bring London society to him at Amwell. His subterranean grotto, which consists of six underground chambers linked by passageways and air tunnels, attracted thousands of visitors – including the famous literary critic Dr Samuel Johnson. On the hill above the grotto there is also a summerhouse, which would once have boasted an extensive view over Ware.

For more information about the site's historical significance, see either Perman's guide or the following websites:

- <http://www.scotts-grotto.org/>
- <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/grotto>
- <http://www.wareonline.co.uk/features/scotts.asp>



Photo credit: Graham Watson

(ii) Recent Management History

After Scott's death in 1783, the grotto was in the possession of his daughter, Maria, until her death in 1863. Scott's Road was subsequently built and the grotto came into the garden of a large Victorian house, which was demolished in the 1960s to make way for the construction of modern housing.

At this stage, Scott's Grotto was owned by Ware Urban District Council. However, following the passage of the Local Government Act in 1974, wherein the district of East Herts was formed and superseded the former local government structure, EHC acquired possession of the site. The council carried out basic repairs and the grotto was opened to the public in 1983 by Ware Society – a local organisation whose remit lies in preserving the town's character and improving its amenities.

These management arrangements have been maintained ever since. EHC are responsible for the site and its maintenance and Ware Society manage visitors to the grotto. In 1990, a full-scale restoration of the grotto was proposed and managed by Ware Society. The total cost of these works was £124,000: EHC contributed £60,000; English Heritage made a grant of £32,000; and the remaining funds were raised by Ware Society from businesses, private donors, charitable trusts and other bodies. Scott's Grotto is a Grade I listed site (part of the 1.3% of listed

buildings in the District) and the summerhouse and gardens are individually Grade II* listed.

(iii) Overview of Present Activities

A total of 31 volunteers for the Ware Society assist in managing visitors to the site. Estimations by Ware Society suggest that the average number of hours volunteers spend on tasks related to Scott's Grotto each year is 210 hours: 155 hours for normal openings; 15 hours for evening groups; 10 hours for exceptional visits and 30 hours for maintenance.

Scott's Grotto is currently only open to visitors from the beginning of April to the end of September, during scheduled weekend opening hours (2pm-4.30pm each Saturday and Bank Holiday Monday). Group visits are arranged at other times by prior appointment.

The reason for the seasonal restrictions in access is that a local, independent bat expert claims that the site is a bat hibernaculum during the winter months. The bat population is generally small during winter (<10) and mainly Daubenton's and Natterer's bats. However, much of this is open to interpretation, particularly regarding the legal aspects of bat protection and conservation. A recent bat survey suggested there were up to 4 bats present during the hibernation period.