



THE ROYAL INSTITUTION OF GREAT BRITAIN

Places

Brightling, West Sussex

Mad Jack's FOLLIES

manifestation of their creators' whims.

And, being without purpose, the forms they can take are boundless – pavilion, temple, grotto, obelisk, tower, cone, pyramid, sham facade of a castle or ruin. Any style of architecture is acceptable from Grecian to Gothick, Roman to Rural. With follies, anything goes – the weirder the better.

However, it wasn't Fuller's follies that earned him the nickname Mad Jack; it was his uncontrolled behaviour in the House of Commons. After nine years as MP for East Sussex, his parliamentary career came to an abrupt end when he was obliged to resign his seat following 'disorderly conduct' and the 'use of oaths' in the House.

AN INTENSELY PATRIOTIC MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Some of his follies do have a touch of madness about them though. His tomb, built 24 years before he died, is a 25 ft high stone pyramid.

The British have always liked their 'characters' – those individuals set apart from ordinary folk by their unconventional behaviour. John Fuller, an eccentric in true English tradition, and known variously as Mad Jack, Honest Jack and (because of his 20 stone weight) Hippopotamus, was squire of Brightling for some 57 years.

When he died in 1834 he left behind an unforgettable mark on the Sussex landscape: an unparalleled group of follies dotted around the village of Brightling and visible from nearby roads, perched on a hill between Battle and Heathfield. Beneath one of them he lies buried.

Follies flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries as indulgences of the wealthy. While some of them are attractive features made to enhance the gardens of large country houses, most true follies serve no purpose at all – they are really nothing more than the

inscription, but could well have been erected to commemorate Wellington's victory at Waterloo – Fuller was an intense patriot.

The prettiest folly is the Grecian rotunda temple, situated on the top of a hill in the park and believed to have been designed by Sir Robert Smirke, the architect of the British Museum in London. It was certainly Smirke who designed the imposing Observatory. Now a private house, Fuller equipped it with sophisticated astronomical apparatus.

Half-hidden in tangled woodland – in Fuller's time a majestic avenue of beeches stood there – is a small Gothick summerhouse built of Coade stone, an artificial stone developed by a Mrs Coade in London in 1769.

Mad Jack's interest in science led him to establish two professorships at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, the first holders being Michael Faraday, the pioneer of electrical engineering, and Dr Peter Roget, a physiologist better known for his thesaurus.

HE TURNED DOWN THE OFFER OF A PEERAGE

He was also a generous patron of the arts. The painter Turner was a frequent visitor to Brightling, and Fuller commissioned a number of watercolours and oils of the surrounding countryside. Fuller put up a plaque in Brightling Church to the memory of another regular, William Shield, Master of the King's Music.

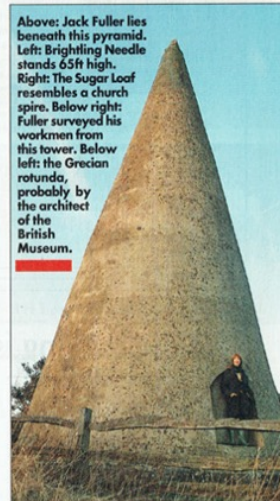
On being offered a peerage, Fuller refused with typical outspokenness. "I was born Jack Fuller and Jack Fuller I'll die," he commented.

At his death, at the age of 77, a marble bust was placed in the 14th century village church. The Latin inscription beneath reads: 'Nothing is useful which is not honest'. It is a fitting memorial to the bluff, rumbustious, but ultimately, Honest, Jack.

Geoffrey Clarke



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Above: Jack Fuller lies beneath this pyramid. Left: Brightling Needle stands 65ft high. Right: The Sugar Loaf resembles a church spire. Below right: Fuller surveyed his workmen from this tower. Below left: the Grecian rotunda, probably by the architect of the British Museum.

FOLLY FACTS

■ The Folly Fellowship aims to preserve and promote the enjoyment and awareness of follies, grottoes and garden buildings. Annual subscription costs £12.50 and includes a quarterly magazine and invitation to a garden party at a folly.

For further details contact The Folly Fellowship, 21 Beacon Road, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 7HY (tel: 081 348 1234).

■ The Landmark Trust has several follies among their properties which they let for holidays. For a handbook listing all their properties contact The Landmark Trust, Shottesbrooke, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 3SW (tel: 0628 825925).

MATTHEW POOL