



Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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The year so far.....

The first visit of the year was to *The Wombourne Wodehouse*, where our members were given a warm welcome by the owner, Mr. John Phillips, and his wife, Caroline. The earlier part of the visit was spent in the gardens, at the heart of which is the walled kitchen garden, first established in the late 1700s and covering an exact acre. Here, in the old orchard, we admired the collection of irises for which these gardens are noted.

And then the rain came, and we were driven into the house for an earlier-than-planned guided tour.

The house itself dates from 1240 and was built in the form of a traditional medieval hall-house with low-ceilinged rooms. In Elizabethan times, the hall was painted, and, even now, vestiges of red paint can be seen on some of the beams in the entrance hall. The house still boasts the best example of a spear truss left in Staffordshire.

In the late 1700s, there was a plan to turn the house round so that it faced the pond, but, at £3600, this was thought too expensive, so, instead, two large rooms were added to the side of the house, and, in the next century, eight weather vanes were added to the roof in order to give the house a romantic skyline. However, their function is decorative rather than functional, since they sometimes point in different directions as a result of having been erected in the lee of the hill.

A tour of the house more than made up for the restricted tour of the gardens. Additions and change of use over centuries of habitation have altered the original layout of its interior in a conspicuous and interesting way. Moreover, *The Wombourne Wodehouse* houses a very fine collection of paintings, china, glass and period furniture brought to the house over many years by its discerning owners and now treasured and cared for by John and Caroline.

However, those disappointed that more time could not be spent in the gardens will have the opportunity of listening to an illustrated talk by Dianne Barre on the gardens in the eighteenth-century in the rain-free setting of Roxboston College in October. Remember, too, that *The Wombourne Wodehouse* opens each year under the National Gardens Scheme, though not now until 2008.

The following month, the Trust visited *Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens*, where members were given a richly-informative guided tour by husband and wife, Martin and Sybil Mizon-Hind. These gardens are a rare example of the eighteenth-century fashion for formal gardens, and their survival is a tribute to the dedication of the teams of volunteers who have worked tirelessly since the *Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Trust* was set up in 1985 to rescue the gardens from decades of neglect and restore them to their former splendour, aided by financial support from a number of public bodies and commercial interests.

At *Castle Bromwich*, classical garden buildings rescued from dereliction, authentic eighteenth-century garden design and historically-accurate planting combine to give visitors a unique opportunity virtually to step back three centuries and experience at first hand the tastes and fashion of a by-gone age (always provided, of course, that one can shut one's ears to the sound of modern jet aircraft passing overhead on their way to and from Birmingham Airport!).

Our final visit of the summer was to *Mayfield Hall*, in the east of the county. *Mayfield Hall* is a Georgian manor house whose three-acre garden contains many of its earliest garden features, amongst them an almost unique set of egg-timer steps (the only others in the country are in Wiltshire), a walled kitchen garden and an ice-house, as well as a clock tower and dovecote.

Two-and-a-half years ago, the present owners, Michael and Eva Brett, embarked on a comprehensive programme of modernisation, re-roofing, re-plumbing and re-decorating the Hall and reclaiming the gardens from long years of neglect. Such a long-term enterprise needs substantial investment, and Michael and Eva plan to fund it by offering high-class holiday accommodation; already, bed-and-breakfast facilities are available within the house, and there are plans to develop a Holiday Let section in the nearby outbuildings.

News LETTER

After a guided tour of the gardens and the cellars of the house (from which tunnels ran to the edge of the estate, thus allowing the servants to reach the house without being seen by the family!), the group were given a tour of *Mayfield* led by two members of the *Mayfield Heritage Group*. The history of *Mayfield* goes back at least a thousand years and was at times turbulent; Bonnie Prince Charlie's army passed through the village on its retreat from Derby and left their mark on the west door of the medieval church, where the villagers had taken refuge and the Scots, unable to break in, vented their anger and frustration by firing through the door.

A dominant feature of the village is the large mill at the side of the River Dove; built in 1795 as a cotton mill, it is still providing employment for the neighbourhood but is now producing man-made fibres. Nor did it provide only employment; built (in some cases literally) in the shadow of the mill stand rows of stone cottages, once tenanted by workers and still forming a small community, though not all are now occupied by mill workers.

Happily, the enjoyment of the visit was guaranteed by an uncharacteristically dry and sunny day, the only dry and sunny day midway through a fortnight of wind and rain!

The Trust continues its programme of visits with visits to *Derby Arboretum* on September 8th and to *Beaudesert Park* on November 3rd. Details of these visits appear elsewhere in the newsletter.

(Useful websites: *Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens* www.cbhgt.org.uk
Mayfield Hall www.mayfieldhall.co.uk
Derby Arb' www.derbyarboretum.co.uk
Beaudesert Trust www.beaudesert.org

FOOTNOTES

Lichfield's Historic City Centre Parks

Lichfield District Council has, in partnership with Lichfield City Council, submitted an outline bid for £4m. to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to restore Lichfield's city centre parks. The detailed plans can be downloaded from www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/historicparks

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2007 PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

The Trust was privileged to be addressed at this year's Annual General Meeting by its new President, Sir Patrick Cormack, whose passion for conserving our national heritage has been amply demonstrated during his thirty-seven years as a Member of Parliament.

Sir Patrick confessed to not being a great lover of gardens, but he had devoted a lot of attention to matters relating to our historic heritage and, as a member of the Trust for a number of years, he had been aware of the work done by the Trust. This, he believed, was very important and marched very well with work of the County's two other Conservation Trusts (of which he was also President), the Staffordshire Buildings Trust and the Staffordshire Historic Churches Trust.

Thirty-three years ago, Sir Patrick said, he had been instrumental in forming the Arts and Heritage Group, which now had three hundred members in both Houses of Parliament. The Group believed that the nation enjoyed a marvellous heritage which deserved championing and had successfully campaigned for the future of Weston Park, formerly the home of the Earls of Bradford and, in Sir Patrick's view, "one of the glories of the English country home", which was now managed by a Trust, Calke Abbey, in Derbyshire, and Tyntesfield, in North Somerset, both now safely in the care of The National Trust.

England's greatest contribution to European culture had been the country house and park; having been spared invasion and violent revolution England had more than any other European country. Moreover, in The National Trust this country had the greatest amenity society in the world, but Sir Patrick felt that the days of acquisition and preservation were over because of the increasing need for substantial endowment.

As a consequence, everything must be done to encourage private owners and make it easier for them to remain in situ.

Sir Patrick believed that it was essential that the young should be involved, and he highlighted the work of the William Morris Craft Fellowship, which awarded fellowships to craftsmen which allowed them to travel around the country for six months looking at great buildings, some under restoration, thus improving their knowledge of their own craft and learning more about others.

Last year had seen the institution of the Queen Mother Memorial Medal, which had been presented by the Duke of Gloucester to John Baskerville for his work at Calke Abbey, Dunham Massey and Chastleton House.

Sir Patrick thought that this award might be extended to gardening, adding that he would shortly be meeting Gilly Drummond, President of the Association of Gardens Trusts, to see whether anything could be done nationally to encourage young people to go into gardening as a career. There was still a snobbish attitude towards those who worked with their hands and a belief amongst some that you were a failure if you did not have an academic leaning – this had to be combated.

Competitions could be arranged for school-children, and head teachers could be encouraged to invite speakers on parks and gardens into their schools to talk to pupils and stimulate an interest in horticulture and garden design.

He was pleased to hear that the Trust was involving pupils from Queen's Court School in the work of restoring



Monks Walk and that South Staffordshire Council had implemented schemes for working with excluded children and young offenders.

Sir Patrick was convinced that an enormous amount could be done to spread knowledge of and affection for our historic parks and gardens. Some things, he concluded, were of enduring worth and should unite all people of good-will.

'VICTORIAN GARDENS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE' Colchester 28th April 2007

This study day was organized and hosted by the Essex Gardens Trust as part of a programme of events celebrating their tenth anniversary. It was held in a church hall adjacent to the historic Colchester Castle Park and consisted of a range of speakers as well as a tour of the park.

The first speaker, Patrick Denney, a local historian, set the scene by describing Victorian Colchester, a market town on the main route to London (now better known as the A12) that the railway reached in 1843. Local industries included engineering, tailoring, boot and shoe manufacturing and horticulture. Colchester was the home of the nurserymen Bunting & Sons; Isaac Bunting wrote *Essay on the Character of Plants* in 1828 offering advice on laying out gardens. In 1872 he traveled to Japan to begin a business exporting lily bulbs back to the glasshouses in Colchester.

The second speaker was the author Anne Wilkinson, whose topic was 'The Victorian Amateur Gardeners and their Gardens', in which she dealt with the difficulties of pollution, the lack of skilled gardeners and the limited avail-

ability of information for amateurs. The talk was illustrated by a range of slides showing gardens of the period and an advertisement for the latest technological gadget – a lawn mower, as recommended by Shirley Hibberd and needing two people to operate it. Magazines such *The Floral World* and *Gardeners Chronicle* were started to provide the amateur gardener with the information needed to be successful. The different crazes for ferns, rock gardens and geraniums were covered with appropriate slides, including one of a geranium pyramid ten to twelve feet in height.

The last lecture was an introduction to Colchester Castle Park before dividing into two groups for lunch and a guided walk round the park. Covering 60 acres in two sections, the park is a Green Flag and Green Heritage award winner containing Roman and Norman remains. The park surrounds the castle, and much of it was formerly the garden of the adjacent Hollingtrees House, landscaped in the eighteenth century. The site opened as a public park in 1892 although the landscaping work

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2007 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Trust has had another very active year in 2006-7. We were very honoured and gratified that Sir Patrick Cormack accepted our invitation to become the Trust's new President in October 2006. Sir Patrick is well known both as the Member of Parliament for South Staffordshire and also for his commitment to and wide knowledge of the conservation world. Sir Patrick is also President of our fellow County bodies – the Staffordshire Historic Churches Trust and the Staffordshire Historic Buildings Trust. Sir Patrick has suggested a number of interesting ways in which the three Trusts might work together, including a special event which the Council of Management is investigating further.

I was elected Chairman in October. I would like to pay my own thanks to the hard work and inspiring leadership of my predecessor, Sarah Ashmead, who, although she formally

retired from the post at our last AGM, nonetheless continued as Acting Chairman through the summer of 2006.

The Trust received relatively few consultations on planning applications during the year. Your Council hoped that this was a sign of inactivity affecting historic parks and gardens rather than a failure to notify us. As Chairman I intend to speak with local authority conservation staff over the coming months to see how we can strengthen our links and involvement in the planning process. Our major work has been responding to consultations on Local Development Framework documents (the new-style local plans), including one for the suggested Wolverhampton Airport.

Work on recording Staffordshire's heritage of parks and gardens continued with four new reports being prepared on Cannock Town Park, and Palfrey, Bescot and Bentley Parks in

Walsall, the latter being a reminder that our interests cover the whole of the historic county, not just its present administrative area. Information on Farley Hall and Mayfield Hall in north-east Staffordshire was added to our inventory. Your Council has agreed to continue contributing information to the National Database of Historic Parks at the University of York, which is now managed by The Association of Gardens Trusts.

There has again been a very full and varied programme of event for members throughout the year. Visits were made to Weston Park; to Witley Court, in Worcestershire; to Baggeridge Country Park; and jointly with the Historic Buildings Trust to Middleton Hall, North Warwickshire. Members also heard talks from staff at English Heritage about the problems of garden buildings at risk; from the former Conservation Officer of East Staffordshire about conservation philosophy; and from the Manager of Shugborough about recent developments on the estate. The Trust was again represented at the Lichfield Medieval Market and Fayre in partnership with colleagues from the Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Trust.

Your Council would like to pay special tribute to the small band of volunteers doing practical work to restore the Monks Walk garden in Lichfield. When completed, this will stand alongside the nearby herb garden at Darwin's House as instructive and attractive examples of period planting.

Two editions of the Newsletter have appeared. This is our principal means of contacting the majority of our membership. After some discussion, the Council of Management decided not to increase the frequency of distribution due to the high costs of printing and postage. The quality of the Newsletter depends on the editor continuing to receive good and interesting copy, and Council strongly encourages members to send in items of interest.

Finally, as Chairman, I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Council of Management for their work on behalf of the Trust, and also our wider membership for their continuing support of the Trust. In particular, I must single out Bryan Sullivan for very special thanks on behalf of us all for his tireless work editing the Newsletter, organising our programme of events and acting as Secretary to the Council of Management.

I look forward to seeing you all over the next twelve months at one or more of our forthcoming activities.

Alan Taylor

wasn't completed for another four years. The park retains its bandstand and pavilion and has a range of formal planting beds.

This talk and tour led on to the afternoon speaker, Hazel Conway, an expert on public parks, and her talk 'The Victorian Park Movement'. Tracing the development of parks through the need for open space in the increasingly overcrowded industrializing towns and cities, she highlighted some of the early parks in Britain – Derby Arboretum, Victoria Park, London and Philips Park,

Manchester. The work of designers such as Paxton, Milner, Kemp and Mawson was covered before considering the features which Victorian parks boasted – bandstands, shelters, toilets, statues, lakes, palm houses. Features which after a period of neglect and decline are now increasingly being restored as funding is channeled back into parks as their beneficial effects are realized once again.

It was a very informative and interesting day and a walk in Castle Park should be included in any visit to Colchester. AB



Castle Park, Colchester (photograph by Ann Brookman)

Heritage Protection White Paper

In March the Government published a White Paper on *Heritage Protection for the 21st Century*. The main thrust of the White Paper was to simplify and introduce greater transparency into the current heritage protection regime. It is proposed to merge the current categories of listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, and the registers of historic parks and battlefields into a single Register of Historic Buildings and Sites for England. Current arrangements for listed building consent and scheduled monument consent will be replaced by a new procedure for seeking Heritage Asset Consent to be managed by local planning authorities. There will be greater opportunity for public consultation and involvement in the process of adding new sites to the national register. All existing powers of protection will be retained, albeit reshaped, and there will be some protection for the first time to World Heritage Sites. Owners of complex heritage sites will have an opportunity to enter management agreements (Heritage Partnership Agreements) with local authorities or English Heritage to minimise the number of individual applications they might otherwise have to make when looking after their properties. The White Paper also contained other proposals for strengthening local authority heritage provision and protection of marine archaeology. The Trust's Council of Management made the

following comments on your behalf in response to the government's consultation which closed on 1 June:

The SGPT is very pleased that the Government proposes to retain all existing powers of protection for the historic environment.

We welcome the principle of the proposed additional measures of protection for locally listed buildings and for World Heritage Sites. However, we consider that the bureaucratic complexity of serving Article 4.1 directions will inhibit use of those powers in the former instance; and that the protection for WHS sites is seriously inadequate, given their recognised international importance.

We welcome in principle the government's intention to simplify perceived complexities in the current system of heritage protection. However, we consider that the proposed new categorisation into national and local designations, both incorporating a mix of statutorily protected and non-statutory sites (e.g. listed buildings v registered battlefields; conservation areas v local listed buildings), will add to confusion among planning officers and members of the public at large and raise false expectations of the levels of protection available.

We are particularly concerned that the White Paper does not propose either the statutory protection of registered parks and gardens (and battlefields) or to suggest further discussion of the issue. Although registered sites will now be entered on the unified national register of heritage assets their lack of statutory protection leaves them vulnerable to insensitive change or irrevocable damage outside the scope of planning control. We would strongly urge the government to introduce measures for the statutory protection of registered historic parks (and battlefields).

We are disappointed that the White Paper

does not propose the blanket withdrawal of permitted development rights in conservation areas. The present discretionary arrangement for serving Article 4.2 directions is bureaucratic, time consuming and can lead to confusion and inconsistency. We would strongly encourage the government to withdraw all permitted development rights in conservation areas.

We welcome the suggested introduction of Heritage Partnership Agreements. Imaginatively used, these could help stimulate effective management of historic parklands. However the absence of any form of statutory protection for parks and gardens means such agreements could be largely worthless if an owner defaulted in matters over which there was no legal power of redress.

Although the White Paper sets out a vision for protecting and managing the historic environment in the future it is seriously lacking in details about the mechanisms and resources, both financial and administrative, by which this vision can be accomplished. The Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust would have welcomed much greater clarity about how the aspirations and intentions of the White Paper will be delivered and regrets that this is not currently forthcoming.

The consultation period closed on 20th June and the government is now assessing the many responses received from heritage bodies across the country. It is expected that a draft bill will be placed before parliament in the 2007-8 session and that, if enacted, the new legislation for protecting all aspects of the built and archaeological heritage will come into force in 2009-10.

THE JOYS OF GARDENING

It is true, since the Fall of our Progenitors, the work is not so easy as before it was, the Curse having covered the Ground with Thorns and Briars, so that the Ground which before, without Cultivation, would have been spontaneously Obedient to vegetative Nature, must now, by the Sweat of the Brow, and no little Labour, be brought under Subjection: But then at the same time, to make Amends, this very Labour is salutiferous: The Exercise of the Body prevents the Blood and the Juices from stagnating and growing corrupt; and the Labourer is every Moment drawing in with his Breath a wholesome and enlivening Stream from the Earth, which causes the Blood and spirits to circulate briskly; and together with the Motion of the Body, forces out and expels the morbid Parts through the Pores, which exhaling, leaves what remains more pure and uncontaminated. Besides, Labour sets an Edge to the Appetite, gives a more grateful and delicious Relish to the Products of the Earth, and at Night disposes the whole bodily Frame into a Capacity for the full Enjoyment of those refreshing Slumbers, that balmy Sleep, which generally forsakes the Downy Conches of the inactive indolent Great. Philip Miller, *The Gardeners Dictionary*, 1731.

Still to come.....

Saturday September 8th: Visit to Derby Arboretum.

Derby Arboretum was the first publicly-owned park in the country, opened in 1840. The visit, which will be led by one of the city's Blue Badge Guides, will start at 2.00pm and will cost £2.50. There will be an opportunity to take part in an optional morning visit to the nearby Royal Crown Derby Works. This will begin at 10.00am and will cost £4.95. Members will already have received a booking form for this visits; further copies may be obtained by ringing 01543 684965.

Wednesday October 17th: Talk by Dianne Barre on "Samuel Hellier's Follies". This talk will take place in The Holtom Room, Rodbaston College, Penkridge, and will begin at 7.30pm.

The speaker has researched in depth into the history of the gardens at The Wombourne Wodehouse during her

study of eighteenth-century gardens in Staffordshire and will talk about the development of the gardens and estate at The Wombourne Wodehouse during that period.

Saturday November 3rd: Visit to Beaudesert Park, near Lichfield.

The Beaudesert Trust has recently prepared a bid for lottery funding for an ambitious programme for the restoration and regeneration of this historic landscape park, once the home of the Marquesses of Anglesey. The proposals include restoring the gardens in co-ordination with a heritage walk trail; highlighting the footprint of the demolished Hall and stables; and carrying out repair work on the cascades. The visit will be led by Michael Street, Chairman of the Beaudesert Trust, and will include a presentation and guided tour of the site. It will start from the Chapel at 2.00pm. Further details and booking form will be sent to members nearer the date of the visit.