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News LETTER

RESEARCHING STAFFORDSHIRE'S HISTORIC GARDENS

A small but enrapt audience was present to hear Dianne Barre's talk on her researches into Staffordshire's historic gardens in preparation for the publication this September of a book on Staffordshire in Redcliffe Press's series on "The Historic Gardens of England"*.

Ninth in the series, which is funded by a grant of £340,000 from The Leverhulme Trust, it is soon to be followed by books on Somerset and Warwickshire.

Written by Timothy Mowl, Professor of History of Architecture and Designed Landscapes at the University of Bristol, the series was expected to occupy him for five or six years, and the grant has enabled him to employ experienced researchers such as Dianne to cover the initial ground-work. Dianne had previously spent six years under Professor Mowl's tutorship studying for her PhD on the lost formal gardens of Staffordshire 1690 – 1750, and she had already researched thirty sites in the county.

After she and Professor Mowl had decided to focus on a period ranging from Tudor times to the present day, Dianne spent the first six months of the project compiling an initial list of 100 possible places. All had to be chosen for good reason, and a certain amount of selection was necessary.

Describing the methodology followed, Dianne said that the first step was to create a file for each site. Each file recorded the names of the owner and designer, a contact name, telephone number and email address, as well as the OS reference number of the site, and the

parish and area in which it was located. If it appeared on English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens or the National Database, this, too, was recorded, and printed material already available was noted. The date of the letter of introduction written to each owner was noted, as well as the date on which he or she replied, though not all letters were answered.

Dianne next took advantage of previously published material ("Why re-invent the wheel?") and found "A Bibliography of British Gardens", by Ray Desmond, of particular value, even though it had first been published more than twenty years before. The English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens was also consulted, though it yielded only fourteen gardens (as opposed to parks) in Staffordshire. An appeal to Suzy Blake, Historic Environment Records Officer at Staffordshire County Council's Development Services Directorate, resulted in a response of two thousand pages of material from the Staffordshire Historic Environment Records, which include reports from archaeological sites, fieldwork reports, aerial photographs and surveys, though the focus of Dianne's research was limited to buildings in the gardens, not floral planting. The Staffordshire Parks and Gardens Trust's own database provided over 100 possible

sites, though many were recorded elsewhere.

Two early publications which offered a wealth of material were "The Natural History of Staffordshire" (1686), written by Robert Plot and illustrated with detailed engravings by the Dutchman, Michael Burghers (some of which are reprinted in the book), and "The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire", written by the Rev. Stebbing Shaw and published in 1801.

Other printed material which was to yield valuable insights included sales catalogues (as in the case of an 1805 sales catalogue for Fisherwick, where house and Capability Brown's landscape have long since gone), original articles and "For Sale" notices in magazines like "Country Life" and Staffordshire's own county magazines (whose illustrations show gardens when they were in their prime), and articles in horticultural magazines and postcards. OS maps and tithe maps provided sequential evidence of the development which had taken place over a number of years and often gave glimpses of what had once been but now has gone. (Capability Brown, in drawing up his proposals for the development of a park, sometimes indicated existing features which he proposed to remove by outlining them

continued overleaf

with dotted lines, giving a before-and-after impression invaluable to the researcher!). On the other hand, as Dianne discovered, some sketches and plans were best viewed with caution lest they illustrated features which, at the time he commissioned the draughtsman or artist the owner intended to introduce, but, in the event, never built, perhaps because he had run out of money!.

This initial trawl yielded 200 sites, so some selection was necessary. Some gardens were considered of insufficient interest, and, while a book on Staffordshire's lost gardens would undoubtedly be of great interest, this was not the book which Dianne and Tim were writing. The gardens chosen had to be important for some reason or other: did a garden have a quirky character? did it have a superb layout? was it likely to last for the next fifty or sixty years?

Having filled three drawers of her filing cabinet with documentary material, Dianne then set about arranging visits to the selected sites, first on her own and then with Tim. Time limited the number of visits that could be made, and where the gardens were already well documented, they had to rely on what was already in print.

Most owners replied to her letter of introduction, and, usually, she was made very welcome on her visits. However, Dianne soon discovered that timing her visits was of the essence; her own visit to

Fisherwick took place in the winter, when early spring flowers were already in evidence and surviving features of the earlier garden readily discernible, but when she returned with Tim some months later, heavy rain made them extremely difficult to locate.

She found some of the larger houses, once occupied by a single family, now multi-tenanted; this obliged her to seek permission from a number of occupiers, which, in one case, she failed to secure. In her travels she found some unexpected delights such as the amazing neo-classical Temple at Bishton Hall, Colwich, so impressive that she believes that it should be known nationally. Local tradition holds that it and the adjacent screen wall were built to hide the newly-arrived Trent Valley Railway half a mile away, but a sketch of 1838 shows that it was in existence at least seven years before.

New discoveries were made, notably at Packington Hayes, near Tamworth, where the owner, Richard Barnes, built a folly-castle in 2008. In Hagley Park, on the outskirts of Rugeley, the site of Hagley Hall, there survives an unusual eighteenth-century grotto, a labyrinth of vaulted tunnels and ante-chambers leading to a classical rotunda, but, to protect it from further vandalism, it has been sealed off and, for safety reasons, public access is now denied.

Batchacre Hall stands close to the border with Shropshire and is within sight of

The Wrekin. Farming has obliterated the landscape laid out in the mid eighteenth century by its owner, Admiral Richard Whitworth, which included an eighty-acre lake on which mock naval battles were fought. The site of the lake is now a soggy field, but hanging in the house is a canvas showing the Admiral viewing his estate through a telescope from the flat roof of the Hall.

In the same way, we owe our knowledge of the gardens laid out at Calwich Abbey in the 1740s by Bernard Granville to a series of sketches drawn by his sister, the celebrated Mrs. Delany, famous for the grottoes she designed, who, from her home in Dublin, supplied him with shells with which to line his grotto, now, alas, long gone.

There were bizarre moments, too; offered a copy of an early tithe map on which his property featured, one owner, clearly deficient in a sense of history, responded, "Good Heavens, I've a much more up-to-date map than that!"

The book was never intended to be all-embracing, and there is still a lot of research to be carried out and discoveries to be made. After all, as Dianne says, Staffordshire is a county which has a lot going for it!

*Available from any good book-seller at the Recommended Retail Price of £19. 99.
Copies are also available from Dianne Barre (tel. no. 01543 417991



The second destination was Harlaxton Manor, built by Gregory Gregory (1786-1854) between 1832 and 1842 to rival the established seats particularly the neighbouring Belvoir Castle.

The mile long entrance drive skirts the elaborate wall of the kitchen garden before passing through a gatehouse and continuing up to the house. The gardens around the house are on several levels giving views over the house itself and the surrounding countryside. A conservatory, one of the largest in the East Midlands, was added to one corner of the building (see photo), behind it the Lion Terrace is currently being restored.

The final visit was to Easton Walled Gardens, which cover twelve acres in the south west corner of the county; they have been in the Cholmeley family since 1592. The gardens were continuously cultivated until World War II, and Easton Hall itself was demolished in 1951. The restoration of the gardens began in 2000, twenty tons of debris were removed, terraces reseeded and thousands of bulbs planted. Early varieties of narcissus, including Van Sion and Victorian hybrids, have appeared since the clearing. An ornamental bridge over the River Witham connects the terraces below the site of the house to the walled garden.

The conference next year will be hosted by the Isle of Wight Gardens Trust.

Ann Brookman



Association of Gardens Trusts Weekend Conference

4-6 September 2009.

Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust, along with the other County Trusts, is a member of the Association of Gardens Trusts (AGT) which holds an annual weekend conference hosted by one of the Trusts. This years conference was hosted by Lincolnshire Gardens Trust and based in Lincoln with the title 'Come into the garden': exploring garden literature, Tennyson and Joseph Banks.

The programme, a mixture of business (the AGM of the AGT), talks and visits and the weekend is an opportunity to meet members of trusts from all over the country. The talks provided an introduction to Lincolnshire and its gardens with specific coverage of those that were scheduled for visits. After the conference dinner on Saturday, there was an entertaining talk by John Harris on his work researching for the Lincolnshire edition of the Pevsner guides.

Two visits were made on Saturday, the first to Doddington Hall, built at the end of the sixteenth century by architect Robert Smythson (d.1614) for Thomas Tailor (d.1606), the Registrar of the Bishop of Lincoln. It has never been sold and remains unchanged.

As we arrived, the Hairy Bikers were setting up to film on the lawn in front of the house in the East garden. The



North Garden retains some ancient sweet chestnuts that date from the original gardens while the West Garden was laid out to an Elizabethan style design by William Goldring in 1900, there is also a 2 acre walled garden.

The afternoon visit was to Harrington Hall, originally built in the fifteenth century but subsequently altered several times. The house was the inspiration for some of Tennyson's poetry including *Maud* and 'Tennyson' himself was there to greet us. The house is situated beyond a round lawn at the front and overlooks an extensive kitchen garden to the rear. Adjacent to the Round Lawn is the Square Lawn and Terrace which gives views over the surrounding countryside.



The visits on Sunday started at Aubourn Hall, built for Sir John Meres, Sheriff of Lincoln in the 1620s. The house has remained in the Nevile family since 1634 and was the home of Sir Henry Nevile, MP, the founding President of the Lincolnshire Gardens Trust.

JOHN WEBB who's he?

Part 3 *Solanum tuberosum or Tilia cordata?*

In looking at the life and work of the Staffordshire landscape gardener and architect John Webb (1754-1828) my previous articles have considered the travelling involved and the problems encountered with staff and materials. This article will now look at the key to a successful Georgian garden makeover.

The English landscape garden is exemplified by trees, thousands of

them, used for shelter belts, plantations and ornament. Webb was supplied by a number of nurseries in Birmingham, Liverpool and Chester and strived to obtain good quality plants, but what to do with 20,000 on site to ensure their survival? The answer appears to be to plant potatoes.

In May 1805 Webb writes to Earl Grosvenor at Eaton Hall to update him on progress of the works on the estate. At this time the paddocks are being drained, roads laid and the plantations staked out. He writes regarding the Chester approach road 'having likewise marked out the Plantations on each side, part of which is already finished and planted with potatoes'. The need to do this was spelt out in a subsequent letter some two years later, when Webb commented on the progress of the plantation at Ecclestone Hill:

I was very sorry to find that Plantation in such a state but it was owing to not having been Dug and planted with potatoes, this is manifest from patches of it having been planted with Potatoes the first year and you may see by the Growth of the Trees where they were to a yard and this is my reason for requesting your Lordship to

have the whole of the Plantations Dug over this year and planted with either Potatoes or Beans.

He goes on to explain the benefit potatoes bring:

I am confident from expressions that you gain three years in six in the growth of Trees (besides saving many) by keeping the soil Clean and loose so that the Roots may shoot freely and not only so but the Potatoes will more than pay for the Labour.

Planting potatoes over an extensive area proposed for woodland would not only have been labour intensive but delayed the tree planting for a year, so it is understandable that landowners may have preferred the instant effect that the trees would offer. However, it frustrated Webb, who had the long term appearance and health of the trees in mind, plus the knowledge on cultivation acquired through experience.

Ann Brookman

My thanks to Eileen Simpson, Archivist at Eaton Hall, for her assistance in allowing access to the Webb correspondence.

“Jacobites and Tories, Whigs and True Whigs”

The Wentworth Castle Heritage Trust has restored the architectural and landscape fabric of the 500-acre estate that was created by Tory/Jacobite Earl of Stafford, assisted by the Jacobite architect, James Gibbs.

Next year, the Trust will be hosting a conference on political gardening in Britain between 1700 and 1760 at Wentworth Castle on Friday, August 6th, to Sunday, August 8th, when eleven speakers will be discussing the ways that country estate symbolism distinguished the warring factions of British politics. Through site tours, delegates will also explore the Jacobite features of the mansion, gardens and park.

One of the most important historic gardens in the North of England, Wentworth is the home of the National Collections of Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias.

For further information, including residential and non-residential options, contact Dr. Patrick Eyres at patrickjeyres@googlemail.com, ring 0113 230 4608 or write to “Jacobite Conference, Wentworth Castle Heritage Trust, Lowe Lane, Stainborough, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S75 3ET.

"DELECTABLE VARIETY, ORDER AND DIGNITY"

The Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth Castle

Kenilworth Castle, which once belonged to John of Gaunt, was granted to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, by Queen Elizabeth, in 1563, and he then spent a fortune converting it into a palace fit to receive the Queen, whom he hoped to marry. Elizabeth visited Kenilworth on a number of occasions, the last and longest in July 1575, a visit which lasted nineteen days.

Dudley spared no expense in entertaining her, providing water-pageants, bear-baiting, plays and masques, performances by minstrels and acrobats, dancing and feasting, and a display of fireworks that could be seen and heard twenty miles away, and even building a set of apartments especially for her use. At the same time, he designed a privy, or private, garden, in the contemporary Italianate style, and it is this garden which English Heritage, responsible for the maintenance of the castle since 1964, set out to re-create. In this endeavour it was greatly assisted by Robert Langham, Keeper of the Council Chamber at Kenilworth, whose detailed account following his own visit was endorsed by the findings of a painstaking archaeological survey. The result is, in the words of John Watkins, Head of Gardens and Landscapes at English Heritage, "the most complete picture of an Elizabethan garden anywhere".

Access to the garden is by way of a classical loggia leading onto the reconstructed terrace, which offers a vantage point from which to enjoy a panoramic view of the garden below. Running the length of the terrace, said to be the first recorded garden terrace in England, is a balustrade decorated at intervals with an heraldic bear chained to a ragged staff, Dudley's emblem. At each end of the terrace stands an arbour made from green oak, the design based on a sixteenth century engraving by Jacques

Androuet de Cerceau, architect to the Kings of France. From the eastern arbour, visitors once looked out over a vast lake, part of the castle's original defences, to the deer park beyond.

The garden below is divided into four quarters, each quarter containing a knot garden planted with flowers associated with the Elizabethan period and framed by low, gated fences of trellis-work covered with privet, hawthorn and eglantine. At the centre of each stands a pierced obelisk fifteen feet in height and made of wood painted purple to look like porphyry, a costly stone which had to be imported from Egypt.

The beds are planted with sweet-smelling perennials known collectively as "gillyflowers" – carnations, pinks, stocks and wall-flowers. Colour is provided by African and French marigolds.

At the very centre of the garden is an eight-sided fountain made from Carrara marble imported from Tuscany. Attached to each of its sides is a panel depicting a scene from "Metamorphoses", a long narrative poem about love, seduction and mythological transformations written by

the Roman poet Ovid and hugely popular during the Renaissance period. The central column of the fountain is in the shape of twin Atlases joined back to back and supporting a globe capped by a ragged staff, Dudley's own emblem.

The entire fountain was the work of Fairhaven and Woods, a long-established Norwich company which



*The Atlas Fountain
The Elizabethan Garden
Kenilworth Castle*

specialises in craftsmanship in stone and is noted for its conservation work.

As in Dudley's time, water jets in front of the fountain can be activated to spray unwary visitors, such pranks being popular in gardens of this period.

Because aviaries were rare in England at the time, Langham, impressed by what he saw, obligingly described the one built by Dudley in great detail. Painted and gilded, and glittering in the sun as though studded with precious stones, it was the home

of equally-colourful birds whose song combined with the gentle splash of the fountain to bring "harmony to the ear". Nor was taste neglected; strawberries, cherries, apples and pears also grew in the garden, there to tempt, tease and sate the palate.

The Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth, which members will have the opportunity of visiting next year under the guidance of David Jacques, one of the team responsible for its creation, is essentially a summer garden, originally designed to be seen at its best at the time of the Queen's visit in mid-July. However, as will have emerged from this article, Elizabethan gardens were not just pretty to the eye; they were intended to provide a feast for all the senses, where the visitor can, in Robert Langham's own words, enjoy "at one moment, in one place, at hand, without travel, ...so full a fruition of so many God's blessings, by entire delight unto all senses (if one can take it) at once". Such delights await members!



*The Dog Bone Pond
Little Onn Hall*

Monks Walk update report November 2009.

The Monks Walk group were successful in applying for a Staffordshire County Council Arts Grant this year, and supplemented the grant with funding from the Co-operative Community Scheme to create a Story-telling Circle in the wildlife area and a traditional thatched dovecote as a focal point in the central shrubbery border.

The English Oak stump stools and Indian-style seat were supplied by a Tamworth company called 'Wooden Objects of Desire', and the installation was achieved by Monks Walk Group volunteers on Saturday 31st October. The newly-fixed seats were instantly in use for an impromptu group meeting (see photograph) and they will become a favourite rest and recovery area for the growing number of hard working volunteers and the visits by students from Queens Croft School.

The dovecote was constructed and installed by David Wood, Master Thatcher of Handsacre, and it adds an element of rustic charm to the gardens (see photograph).

The next project planned is a new welcoming signboard to promote the group and the work of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust.

The maintenance will reduce to a tickover during the winter months; however, the gardens provided nearly 50 bags of fallen leaves for composting and re-cycling by a local allotment holder. Regular working sessions will resume on Wednesday evenings in April.

Why not visit the gardens when you are next in Lichfield – behind the Library. For further information please contact Sarah 01543 473222.

Sarah Ashmead, November 2009



WHERE WE WENT IN 2009

This year's programme of visits offered members a variety of gardens – an eighteenth-century landscape, a nineteenth-century garden under restoration, a unique themed garden in Cheshire and a return to one of Staffordshire's best loved attractions.

Envile Hall was, thanks to the kindness of its owners, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Williams, the venue of the Trust's Annual General Meeting this year.

Together with The Leasowes, in Halesowen, and Hagley Hall, near Storubridge, Envile was a "must" for eighteenth-century garden visitors. Its popularity extended into the next century, when the gardens to the north and west of the house were developed and an enormous conservatory, aviaries and extensive planting were introduced; but, while its sloping landscape still remains, affording magnificent views towards the Clent Hills and Wenlock Edge, many of its earlier garden features have now disappeared, and the nineteenth-century garden, which once saw as many as six thousand visitors in a day, no longer exists, replaced by woodland.

The Boat House has gone, demolished by a falling tree, the once-famous Cascades are now a trickling stream; the Chinese Temple lasted just over twenty years (since it was made of wood, it was surely intended at the time it was built to be only a temporary structure); and most of the Seahorse Fountain was reduced to rubble by grenade and mortar practice by the military during World War II. However, the Doric Temple, Shenstone's Chapel, the Gothic Gatehouse and the Gothic Greenhouse still survive in good condition, the last of these now revealed in its full frontal magnificence since the recent clearance of the trees which had previously screened it.

Once the business of the morning had been discharged, members were taken on a walk round the lower grounds led by Peter Williams, who proved a most informative guide.

Our next visit took the form of an expedition into Cheshire, where we visited two very contrasting properties, Mellor's Garden and Gawsworth Hall.

The former provided members with a unique example of a Victorian allegorical garden, which, based on John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress", offered visitors the opportunity of following Christian's journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City, though the challenges confronting members hardly compared with passing through the dangers facing Christian, no worse, in fact, than a slightly wobbly bridge and a wet surface following a period of heavy rain! Nonetheless, the visit gave members a different experience from visiting more conventional gardens, the only parallel in Staffordshire possibly being "Reflections", a garden in Beaudesert Park, near Lichfield, designed to illustrate the twin themes of Ignatian spirituality and environmental conservation.

In contrast, Gawsworth Hall offered a half-timbered manor house, parts of which dated back to the fifteenth century, complete with gallery, solar and chapel, a formal rose garden, broad lawns planted with evergreen trees and shrubs, and a medieval parkland used as a tilting ground until the end of the sixteenth century. What more could one ask for in a single visit?

Our third visit was to Little Onn Hall, where our host was the owner of the property, Mrs. Caroline Bradshaw. The Trust last visited Little Onn Hall in 1995, so a second visit was long overdue!

Built at the end of the nineteenth century by Colonel Charles Ashton, his daughters commissioned Thomas Mawson, the leading landscape architect of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, to design the gardens. Though not all his proposals were implemented, he did lay out lawns and banks, a rose garden, tennis court, yew hedges and borders, as well as planting rhododendrons and azaleas, and much of his work is still in evidence today. One of the most striking post-Mawson features in the garden is the Dog Bone Pool, so called because it is made up of two hexagonal ponds linked by a narrow channel.

Since acquiring the property, Mrs. Bradshaw has dedicated herself to regenerating the garden, opening up a vista by removing a screen of obscuring trees and planting a small avenue within the garden itself. Future plans include laying out a 'natural' garden on its periphery. Very much "hands-on", Mrs. Bradshaw, who, like our other hosts, was generous of both her time and her hospitality, is assisted by a single gardener, while Mr. Bradshaw provides the funding!

The fourth and final visit this summer was a return to Shugborough, where Joe Hawkins, the Head Gardener, continued his guided tour of the estate begun last year.

The tour began in the Kitchen Garden. Originally laid out in 1805, it was twice its present size and included orchard, shelter gardens and slip gardens for hardier plants, and was capable of supplying the family and their 120 dependents with food, as well as providing flowers for the house.

Restoration of the derelict garden began in 2007, and this was the third season of its regeneration. It has taken that long to eradicate all the weeds, in particular the mare's tail which infested it, and it will be intensively planted next year. The absence of planting schemes will allow flexibility, though most plants grown in the garden date back to the eighteenth century. The horticultural practices of that period are also

rigorously followed, modern pesticides and chemical fertilisers being eschewed.

Lottery funding will also allow the glasshouses to be replaced and the pits reclaimed, and it is intended to revive the garden's earlier reputation as a centre of horticultural training.

The walk around the parkland took the party into Lord Lichfield's Arboretum. First laid out by the fifth Lord Lichfield and containing oaks from North America, Europe and Asia, it is still expanding, and his son, the sixth Earl, has, in recent years, planted fifteen more oaks.

Conserving and regenerating the landscape presents an enormous challenge, not least because of the rampant spread of phytophthora*, which is ravaging the landscape from Devon to Scotland. Hosted initially by rhododendron, it also attacks bilberries and heather, and it is feared that it may soon attack oaks. Its spread has been encouraged by wetter summers and winters and the lack of deep frosts, and it can also be spread by deer, which may have to be culled if the spread of the disease is to be controlled. It can only be eliminated if the host tree or shrub is uprooted and burnt.

Other problems to be confronted include the spread of Japanese Knotweed. Introduced as an ornamental plant, but now widespread, it can only be destroyed by injecting every single stem. A scheme to introduce a beetle which feeds off the plant is not without danger, for, as Joe pointed out, what will these beetles turn to when they have eaten all the Knotweed?

The grey squirrel is another destructive force which foresters struggle to contain.

In 1805, much of the park was open parkland, and a programme of thinning will start soon with a view to creating the simple elegance seen at Studley Royal and Rousham. It will not be possible to take the landscape back to the mid-eighteenth century, but new planting will be guided by books in the Hall's library.

A sunny day, a gentle stroll and Joe's informed and entertaining commentary contributed to a memorable afternoon which ended for most with a relaxing cup of tea in the tea-room.

Joe is offering members a tour next year of the outlying areas of the parkland, including Hadrian's Arch

*There are sixty species of the genus, including *phytophthora infestans*, which caused the nineteenth-century Iris Potato Famine. The latest outbreak of the disease was first noticed in the United Kingdom in the mid 1990s.