

# Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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# News LETTER

## “Entire delight unto all senses”

**In June, members were privileged to take part in a visit to the Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth Castle led by David Jacques, himself a member and past Chairman of the Trust, who had been responsible for carrying out the research into the plants of the period so that the planting of the recreated Garden would be entirely authentic.**

This was a garden which, according to Robert Langham, brought together “at one moment, in one place, at hand, without travel” so many of God’s blessings as to give “entire delight unto all senses”. It was created by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, for Queen Elizabeth I at a time when he was still hoping to marry her, and was planted with, amongst other flowers, roses, carnations and marigolds, symbols of passion and devoted love.

Following the English Civil War, the castle was slighted by the victorious Roundheads, who pulled down the north wall and keep, and occupied by a Major Hawke, who took up residence in the Gatehouse, turning the ornamental garden into a kitchen garden. The other buildings became farm buildings and the dam holding back the mere which surrounded the castle was broken down, allowing the water to escape into the neighbouring countryside, to be briefly re-created by the flood of November 2004 (However, any proposal to re-create the mere permanently would be vetoed by The Environment Agency for fear that it might lead to the flooding of the whole of Kenilworth!)

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the ruined castle was a favourite resort of lovers of the Picturesque, drawn at least in part by Walter Scott’s romantic novel, but, after years of neglect, the ruins became dangerous, and anxiety grew about their survival, until, in 1937, the same year in

which he became the first Baron Kenilworth, the castle was bought by Sir John Davenport Siddeley, of Armstrong-Siddeley fame, whose family later donated it to the town, in whose ownership it still remains.

Placed first in the care of The Ministry of Works, the castle has, since 1984, been looked after by English Heritage. When work began on replacing an earlier knot garden with one that was closer in spirit and design to Dudley’s, no trace remained of the original after two centuries of double digging other than a fragment of the fountain, and the creators of the new garden relied heavily on the letter of Robert Langham, which provides the longest and best description of an Elizabethan garden, and, while this spells out in great detail the features of

the garden, many of which were confirmed by archaeological investigation, it says nothing about the design and planting of the knots.

To ensure the authenticity of the planting, there had to be extensive research among sixteenth-century herbals. The plant list drawn up as a consequence of this research was amazingly small; none of the bulbs which are now a staple of the spring garden came into England until the second half of the century, and the plants that were available mainly flowered in June and July. In fact, John Parkinson, writing towards the end of the seventeenth century, distinguished between “English” flowers and “foreign” flowers, the former summer-flowering herbaceous plants, the latter spring-flowering bulbs.



Consequently, Elizabethan gardens enjoyed only a very short season and had to be re-made every spring. It seemed to follow, therefore, that the knots would have been changed every year.

Knots were not restricted to flowerbeds; their intricate patterns could be seen on ceilings and, indeed, there is a sideboard in the Gatehouse at Kenilworth Castle on whose doors knots have been carved. However, authentic designs were taken from the pattern books of Sebastiano Serlio, the contemporary Italian architect and painter who published several books of design and was highly influential as a conveyer of the Renaissance design.

The most popular flower in Elizabethan times was the carnation, so named because it was the colour of flesh and particularly admired for its scent. Elizabethan gardens may have lacked the variety of colour found in modern gardens, but for Elizabethans the enjoyment of gardens depended as much on the 'fragrance of sweet odours breathing from the plants', 'the birds flittering, the fountain streaming, the fishing swimming' (though these may have been of metal, given how little space the bowl allowed for the variety of fish Langham claims to have seen 'pleasantly playing to and fro'. Indeed, it has even been suggested that Langham may not have actually entered the garden, but only viewed it from the terrace, since he doesn't seem to have realised that the obelisks were not



Knot Garden, 1998

actually made of porphyry but of wood painted the colour of the stone to save expense! Nonetheless, on an afternoon of intermittent sunshine and cloud, we certainly experienced the "pleasant whisking wind" of which he wrote!)

Following the tour of the garden, the party were led on a short walk to the Pleasance by Alan Taylor, Chairman of the Trust and English Heritage Inspector for Ancient Buildings and Monuments for the West Midlands, who was already familiar with the site. A small manor house surrounded by a double moat and built in the time of Henry V, it was finally dismantled by Henry VIII and the building re-erected in the Castle. Only the platform on which it stood remains, surrounded by ditches which once formed the moats, awaiting the attention

of the archaeologist and in the meantime watched over by curious and companionable cows.

The Elizabethan Garden is, of course, regularly open to the visitor, just as the site of the Pleasance is also easily accessible by footpath, but the bonus enjoyed by SGPT members is that these visits take place in the company of uniquely-placed individuals whose work has given them an intimate knowledge of these places and who are ready to share their detailed knowledge and professionally-based understanding with other members, and it is this which makes such visits particularly rewarding and enjoyable.

WBS

# Garden Tours

**Susan Worner Tours are offering a series of garden tours, both in the UK and abroad. This year's destinations include the gardens of North Yorkshire, the mimosa and lemon festival at Menton, the gardens of Florence, Fiesole, Rome and the Veneto, the alpine flora of Italy and Switzerland, and, further afield, the gardens of the Caribbean, Morocco and the South Africa Cape. There is also a Cuisine Week in Morocco in October.**

The gardens chosen are privately owned, rarely opened to the public and often showed by their owners or their head gardeners. The tours are led by qualified garden historians fluent in the language of the country being visited.

Anyone interested in finding out more about these tours should contact Susan Worner Tours, PO Box 26, Boroughbridge, York YO51 9YU, or telephone 01904 651 651. The company also has a website [www.susanwornertours.com](http://www.susanwornertours.com).

*"Every kind of fungus can be eaten – but some only once" - Old Russian Saying.*

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2010

**This year's Annual General Meeting took place at Sandon Hall on the evening of Friday, June 25th.**

The Trust's President, Sir Patrick Cormack, opened the meeting by expressing his gratitude to Lady Harrowby for allowing the Trust to hold this year's AGM at the Hall, recalling that it was at Sandon Hall that he was first approached by the Trust's Chairman, Alan Taylor, and asked whether he would become the President of the Trust.

The Treasurer, Jim Earle, then presented his report for the financial year ended 31st March 2010, in which he pointed to the surplus of £750.00 from the Conference held last October at Weston Hall which had contributed to the healthy state of the Trust's finances. The increase in subscription rates had ensured that the Trust's annual expenditure was being met.

His report was followed by the Chairman's, which appears elsewhere in this issue.

The President concluded the business of the evening by thanking the Chairman for his hard work on behalf of the Trust during the past year. He believed the Trust was becoming increasingly influential, and he would be writing to all the newly-elected MPs in Staffordshire bringing the work of the Trust to their attention.

Following the conclusion of the AGM, Jon Guard, Venue Manager at Sandon Hall, gave a short talk on the history of Sandon Hall, the home of the Ryder family since 1776, when the estate was purchased by the first Baron Harrowby. Purchased as a hunting lodge, the house which replaced it was burnt down in 1848, when a workman attaching a hatchment to the roof of the house to commemorate the passing of the first Earl, failed to switch off a blow-torch.

The present Hall was built for the second Earl by Edinburgh-born William Burn, who is believed to have designed or re-modelled as many as six hundred country houses. Built from sandstone quarried from the estate and from Ingestre, the house is now, as the result of a hundred years of industrial pollution from the Potteries, covered with a protective film.

From the eighteenth century onwards the Ryder family had been prominent in the political and legal life of the country; Sir Dudley Ryder, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, was to have been created first Baron Harrowby by George II in 1756, but unfortunately died the day before the kissing the King's hands, and it was not until twenty years later that the title was finally created for his son, Nathaniel.

The name "Harrowby" was taken from a village in Lincolnshire, now a suburb of Grantham, where, at the time, the family had their estate.

The title of "Earl of Harrowby" was created for Dudley Ryder, second Baron Harrowby, Foreign Secretary during the early years of the Napoleonic Wars. A



personal friend of both William Pitt the Younger and Spencer Perceval, both of whom he commemorated in the grounds of Sandon Hall, he sat in the Cabinet with both his brother and his son and was himself offered the position of Prime Minister no fewer than three times, each time declining in the modest belief that it was beyond his capabilities.

1900 was the year of the three earls, the third, who died in March, the fourth, who died in November, and the fifth, who lived for a further fifty-six years! He died in March 1956, three days after the death of his wife, whom he had married in 1877 in spite of the earlier objections of his father on the grounds that her family were in trade;

her father was, in fact, W. H. Smith, founder of a well-known firm of stationers!

The early years of the last century saw a growing involvement in banking through a family connection with Thomas Coutts; the seventh Earl, who died as recently as 2007, was both Deputy Chairman of Coutts Bank and Chairman of NatWest and NatWest International. It was he, too, who opened part of the Hall for private functions, and the Hall is now a popular venue for civil weddings and other functions.

Jane, Dowager Lady Harrowby, then gave an introduction to the history of the garden and parkland, laid out by William Emes between 1781 and 1782. Originally only fifteen acres, it now covers fifty and, once maintained by twenty-three gardeners and three boys, it is now maintained with the help of a single gardener working one day a week, under the supervision of Lady Harrowby herself, though the mowing of the extensive lawns is carried out by a contractor.

Gradually, hitherto neglected areas are being restored; trees lost from the Remembrance Garden, planted in 1936 by ex-allies and ex-enemies of the Great War (who, ironically, were at war again only three years later), are being replaced.

The slow process of restoring the gardens to their former glory is not helped by an infestation of rabbits (which eat anything except the grass!) and squirrels, eight hundred of which were shot last year.

Following these talks, members were encouraged to walk around the grounds after first fortifying themselves with a glass of wine generously offered by Lady Harrowby.

Through the good offices of its President, the Trust has been able to hold successive AGMs at some of the County's most attractive venues, a tradition which was well maintained this year.

# VISIT TO SANDWELL PARK FARM AND DARTMOUTH PARK

In May, members visited Sandwell Park Farm and Dartmouth Park, both part of the beautiful and historic Sandwell Valley. Now in the Borough of West Bromwich and in the ownership of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, they were formerly part of Staffordshire. Thus, the visit offered the party two contrasting locations, though both were historically linked by being once part of the estate of the Earls of Dartmouth.

For nearly two centuries, the heart of the estate was Dartmouth Hall, designed in the Palladian style by the celebrated Smiths of Warwick, brothers Francis and William, but demolished in 1928, the Earl having moved to Patshull seventy years previously. Since that time the Hall had served as both a girls' school and a borstal, but, following its demolition, the only surviving vestige of its former glory is the massive gateway arch standing in incongruous isolation on an island just off the M5 at Junction 1.

## “Walled Gardens are an important part of our history”

During the morning, the party were taken on a guided tour of the farm and walled garden led by John Stokes, Sandwell Metropolitan Council's Senior Countryside Officer, and Roy Simkins, the Head Gardener responsible for the cultivation of the Walled Garden.

Both farm and walled garden were built to provide the Hall with food. Work on restoring the garden, first set up in 1705 and at one time employing as many as thirteen staff (nowadays, it is maintained by two full-time gardeners and a team of volunteers) began back in the late 1980s, and it has now been open to the public for more than twenty years.

The present Walled Garden is much smaller than the original, having been divided first by the construction of a railway built to convey coal from Sandwell Park Colliery to the canal at Galton Valley, where it was loaded onto barges, and then, in more recent times, by the motorway, the abandoned part of the garden having now reverted to woodland, though some old fruit trees can still be seen, as well as the low bridges built to carry the railway track through the garden.

Nonetheless, the present Walled Garden extends for more than an acre and, in addition to supplying the farm shop with vegetables and plants for sale to visitors, it serves as a valuable educational resource, demonstrating to children from local schools how the food their parents buy in supermarkets is produced and providing them with an information pack which tells them where food comes from and gives them hints on growing plants in their own gardens.

The educational experience continues in the farmyard adjacent to the Walled Garden, where the public are able to inspect at close

range a variety of familiar farm animals and to read about their characteristics and their care (One family seemed surprised to discover that farm yards actually smell!).

The appropriate mood for such a visit was set even before entering the farmyard, visitors being directed past a row of Victorian shop-fronts with life-size and authentic-looking models in period dress standing in front of them and hearing the cries of vendors ringing in one's ears.

## “A Public Park Fit for the Twenty-first Century”

After lunch, the party walked the short distance to Dartmouth Park, where Trust member Margaret Foster, a member of the Design Team responsible for preparing the successful bid for Heritage Lottery Fund money towards the cost of an ambitious regeneration plan for the Park, led a guided tour, pointing out surviving historic features and also indicating the improvements planned for the park.

It was in June 1876 that the fifth Earl of Dartmouth agreed to lease land for a park for the inhabitants of West Bromwich. He offered a choice of two sites, both at a nominal rent of £1.00 a year for the next 99 years. The present site was the preferred choice, since it was close to the town centre, yet opens up onto the Sandwell Valley, its elevated position and sloping topography giving excellent views away from the town and over the Valley.

Later that year, an advertisement appeared in “The Gardener's Chronicle” inviting landscape designers to submit designs, sites for a cricket ground, ornamental water and carriageways having been fixed. The task of selecting the winning entry was entrusted to the gloriously-named Exsuperius Weston Turner, himself a landscape designer recommended by the Earl, who chose those of John Maclean, of Loughborough, in Leicestershire. Work commenced in November 1877 and the Park was finally opened to the public on June 3rd, 1878, when, a general holiday having been declared, it was reported that an estimated forty to fifty thousand people thronged the park and adjoining thoroughfares.

Over the years, the park was extended and more features, including a boating-pool, were added, though the nature of the soil prevented the addition of an open-air swimming-pool, a bowling-green being laid out instead. Still later, tennis courts were

added and an avenue of trees planted.

In 1919 the freehold of the Park passed to the people of West Bromwich, and in 1923 the town's War Memorial, located close to the main entrance to the Park, was unveiled by the sixth Earl.

Sadly, the altruism of past generations has not survived the destructive urges of those who followed, and a number of features have now been lost: by the mid 1970s the bandstand had been so heavily vandalised that, for safety reasons, it had to be demolished; similarly, the Refreshment Rooms and the Boathouse were so badly damaged by fire that they too had to be demolished.

But if its past is chequered, what lies in the future for Dartmouth Park? Following the award of a grant of £4.4m under the Parks for People Programme towards the overall cost of £6.6m, work began on its regeneration in January 2010 after wide public consultation.

The principle underlying the restoration is recovering the strength of the original design by removing self-seeds and restoring the avenues and clumps of trees which formed the backbone of the original park. Any new elements introduced have to be sympathetic to the historic character of the Park.

When complete in 2012, it will have provided an outdoor entertainments space, a new Community Pavilion including café, events room and toilets, a skateboard park and an improved children's play area. A nature reserve will also be laid out in the Dell. Then, West Bromwich will have a park fit for the twenty-first century.

WBS

## “Gardening makes children happy and teaches new skills”

A study of ten schools and 1,300 teachers carried out on behalf of the Royal Horticultural Society has concluded that gardening can teach children to be more confident and resilient and to lead healthier lives. It also claims that it can encourage children to become more active in problem-solving and boost literacy and numeracy skills. The Society argues that gardening should be used as a key teaching tool and not just seen as an out-of-school activity.

# SPONSORED WALK

**To commemorate the tercentenary of the birth of Thomas Wright, Joe Hawkins, the Head Gardener at Shugborough, is undertaking a sponsored walk in October to raise funds for the re-planting of the area around The Shepherd's Monument, which was, like The Cat's Monument, designed by Wright.**

He will start at Byers Green, in Durham, Thomas Wright's birthplace, and will spend the next three weeks walking the three hundred and fifty miles to Shugborough, stopping overnight at places associated with Thomas Wright.

The Cannock Chase AONB Unit has already agreed to match the money raised, and the SGPT has promised a substantial contribution. Any member wishing to sponsor Joe should write to him at Shugborough Hall Estate, Milford, near Stafford ST17 0XB, telephone him on 01889 881388 or email [joe.hawkins@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:joe.hawkins@staffordshire.gov.uk).

## RE-ORGANISATION AT BIDDULPH GRANGE

**Council has also learnt that the National Trust has made both the Estate Manager and the Head Gardener at Biddulph Grange redundant and will combine the two posts in a new post of Gardens and Engagement Manager.**

It appears that a similar re-organisation is taking place at other estates.

In future, gardeners will be encouraged to act as guides, in addition to their normal duties, which are likely to be carried out more and more by volunteers.

This news caused considerable concern to Council, who agreed to write to The National Trust expressing their concern at the implied diminution of gardening standards and expertise.

## WIND FARMS

**Your Council of Management has been greatly concerned to learn that Severn-Trent has submitted an application to erect two 400ft wind turbines at a site at Whittington, near Kinver.**

If granted, these giant turbines would be standing on sight-lines between Hagley, The Leasowes and Enville, three of the most historic landscapes in the Midlands, and the SGPT will be submitting a strong objection to the proposal.

## GHS VISIT TO THE WALLED GARDEN AND FERME ORNÉE AT SUGNALL HALL:

**SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16TH, 2010**

**The Garden History Society will be visiting Sugnall Hall, home of Dr. and Mrs. David Jacques, on Saturday, October 16th, 2010, and have invited members of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust to take part in the visit.**

The programme is as follows: start at 11.00 a.m. with coffee and an introductory talk; lunch from 12.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m., followed by a tour of the walled garden and ferme ornée; coffee and cake at 3.30 p.m. Depart.

The inclusive cost will be £30.00 per head, and bookings will be handled by the Garden History Society. SGPT members will receive booking forms nearer the date of the visit.

## AUTUMN PROGRAMME

**There will be a walk round the outer limits of the parkland at Shugborough on Saturday, September 18th, led by Joe Hawkins, the Head Gardener. This will be the third and final walk around Shugborough and will include a visit to Hadrian's Arch.**

It will start from the car park at 2.00 p.m., and the charge will be £3.00 per person.

"Autumn Colours": A Woodland Walk at Alton Towers is being organised for early November. Members will be notified of the arrangements when these have been finalised.

# BOOKSHELF

“The Living Landscape: Animals in Parks and Gardens of Essex” is published by the Essex Gardens Trust Research Group and edited by Twigs Way, a professional garden historian, broadcaster and author.

The book consists of ten essays illustrating and discussing the role once played by animals – cattle and deer, sheep, waterfowl and pheasants, even bees, birds and freshwater fish raised in ‘stewes’- in the designed landscape. These creatures had both an economic and a social value, providing food for the landowner’s table but also demonstrating his wealth and therefore his status.

Deer were raised for venison in large enclosed parks, stocked at a rate of one animal for each acre. They also served to enhance the status of the landowner, and their hunting provided him and his neighbours with sport. Buildings associated with the breeding of deer – deer larders, deer shelters – were a feature of the landscape.

In time, deer were replaced by cattle for economic reasons, being found more profitable, but even these animals could be used to enhance the designed landscape. Certainly, Humphry Repton was aware of their potential, advising on colour, size and number. Generally, Alderney cows were recommended for colour, Jersey cows for their smaller stature, while Ayrshires were also thought to add beauty to the landscape, as well as being good milkers. Cattle also contributed to the aesthetics of the landscape by close-cropping the grass.

Dairies became an at-times highly decorative addition to the farm complex, and the dairy-maid contributed to the romantic imagery of the pastoral tradition.

Rabbits, commonly thought to have been introduced by the Normans, were in fact first brought to this country, like so much else, by the Romans, but,

originating from the Mediterranean, did not survive the British climate, and a hardier breed was later introduced by the Normans. Highly valued for the meat and fur (for which there remained a demand by hatters into Victorian times), they lived in specially-built warrens. Some of these warrens were connected to the neighbouring countryside so as to allow rabbits a wider area over which to graze, which no doubt, given their penchant for burrowing, was why, by the seventeenth century, they were already becoming a menace and are now regarded as a pest.

(Rabbits, like so many other animals in medieval times, had a symbolic significance, their natural characteristics being seen as representing certain Christian values; their need to be alert against predators was regarded as symbolising vigilance, while their inability to defend themselves was seen as symbolising the Christian’s need to trust in Christ’s provision and mercy.)

It has been estimated that there were as many as 26,000 dovecotes in England in the seventeenth century, of which only about two thousand survive. It is known that early man ate pigeon meat. Pigeon dung was highly prized as a fertiliser and was also used for tanning, while its feathers were used to stuff pillows and mattresses. Only the wealthy could afford to build dovecotes, however; its occupants enjoyed protection and the right to roam freely, much, one imagines, to the dismay of the neighbouring tillers of soil and growers of crops!

Honey had long been an indispensable ingredient in domestic catering, at least until the introduction of sugar, and there is evidence of bee husbandry dating

back at least four thousand years. Bees were kept in a variety of receptacles, including straw skeps and inverted clay domes. Later, more sophisticated hives allowed curious humans to study and admire the activities of these social creatures. The hives themselves were housed in bee boles – alcoves in walls – or specially-built bee houses.

Aviaries and menageries, while not economically productive, were nonetheless important features, in the case of aviaries introducing melody to the garden and in the case of menageries a touch of the exotic.

Henry I was the first English monarch to amass a collection of exotic animals, while King John maintained a collection of animals in the Tower of London, where a zoo remained an attraction until relocated in Regent’s Park in 1835. Birds were often housed in richly-decorated aviaries, as recent visitors to the Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth Castle will have noted.

Although the research which forms the basis of this book focuses on estates in Essex, the lessons it draws have a much wider application, and its appeal must surely extend beyond the boundaries of a single southern English county. Copies of the book, which costs £10. 00, may be obtained by sending a cheque made out to “Essex Gardens Trust” for £12. 00 (the additional £2. 00 to cover postage) to Michael Leach, at 2, Landview Gardens, Ongar, Essex CM2 9EQ.

“Enville – Hagley – The Leasowes: Three Great Eighteenth Century Gardens” is the work of two eminent garden historians: Michael Symes is a garden historian based at Birbeck College in the University of London and is already the author of several books of garden history, including a study of Hagley published by the Garden History Society and sponsored by the Hereford & Worcester Gardens Trust and a number of titles in the Shire Garden History series; Sandy Haynes has been archivist to the Enville estate for the past fifteen years and lectures on garden history at Bristol University.

The three gardens had much in common; situated within ten miles of each other, they were all started within a few years, Hagley, the home of George, 1st Baron Lyttelton, in 1739, Enville, the home of Lord Harry Grey, 4th Earl of Stamford, and The Leasowes, the home of the poet William Shenstone, in the early 1740s. All were created on steep sloping sites giving views of distant hills, and, coincidentally, the other parks, and all lent themselves to



18th Century Bee House at Attingham Park, Shropshire

development as pictorial landscapes, designed around a series of "pictures" in which buildings such as a Doric Temple or Rotunda had been carefully placed.

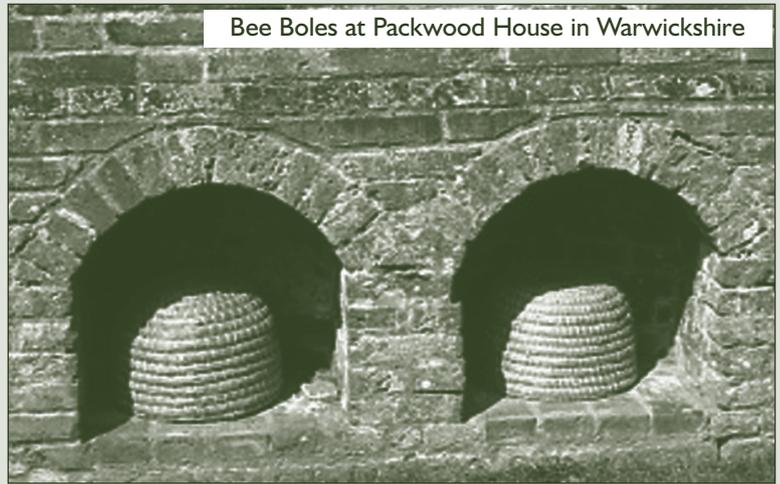
In none was a professional garden designer involved, though Sanderson Miller worked at both Enville, where he designed the Gothic Greenhouse and the Gothic Gateway, and at Hagley, where his best known work is perhaps the Ruined Castle.

All three owners were known to each other and, indeed, Shenstone stayed at Enville and advised the Earl of Stamford in the development of his estate.

Both Hagley and The Leasowes incorporated early examples of the *ferme ornée*, in which decoration and productivity were combined; Shenstone in particular, whose means were limited, could not afford to reduce his income further by reducing the productivity of his estate and, besides, it was becoming increasingly recognised that farm animals and farming activity could, if kept at a distance, enhance the landscape appeal.

All three gardens were highly popular with visitors, who were expected to follow a prescribed circuit whose purpose was to excite a variety of emotional responses, underlined by literary allusions (For that reason, Shenstone, in particular, was upset if

this circuit were not scrupulously followed). Sadly, both Shenstone and Lord Lyttelton had problems with graffiti and other forms of vandalism. How little human nature changes in spite of generations of education!



Bee Boles at Packwood House in Warwickshire

All three sites were highly regarded and were the subject of a number of descriptive accounts, most notably "Letters on the Beauties of Hagley, Envil and The Leasowes", by Joseph Heeley, published in 1777, which enabled the authors of this book to try and reconstruct the original experience of going round these gardens, from which so much has since been lost.

Michael Symes and Sandy Haynes are to be congratulated on producing an outstanding study of these three historically-significant gardens which contributed so greatly to the evolution of garden design both in this country

and abroad, and publication reminds SGPT members to recognise the value of three Midlands gems, one of which is in their county.

This book is published by The Redcliffe Press Ltd. of Bristol at £14. 99 (ISBN 978-1-906593-53-7). In the Foreword, the writers acknowledge that their book may be seen in some way as complementing the book on the historic gardens of Staffordshire written by Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre, also published by The Redcliffe Press and featured in the last issue of The SGPT Newsletter.

WBS

## Monks Walk Group Poetry evening July 2nd 2010

Members of the Lichfield Poetry Society and other visiting poets joined the Monks Walk Group volunteers and supporters for a magical evening of poetry and prose readings in the gardens.

The event celebrated the fulfilment of the vision for the gardens, started by a handful of volunteers some seven years ago, to create a place of quiet reflection in the grounds of the Staffordshire University campus in Lichfield.

Around 35 people joined in, and were offered strawberries and wine to heighten their senses as the poets read mainly garden-related verses at locations around the gardens. The recently-formed story telling circle was the perfect setting for this as the sunlight slanted through the trees towards the end of the evening.

Sarah Ashmead and Pat McGee added to the theatrical atmosphere by dressing in medieval costumes and mingling with the guests. Monks Walk



is a very special place, and hidden from view; most new visitors couldn't believe that they had not known of its existence before.

Events like this are fitting for the place, and serve to raise awareness of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust

to a new audience. Thanks go to the hard work of the regular Wednesday volunteers and to the small committee who plan the events and obtain funding from a variety of sources.

Howard Price  
July 2010.

# Chairman's report to the AGM

**I have to start on a note of sadness and with an apology. As many of you will know, Margaret Richards, a Member of Council, died suddenly after a short illness last winter. Margaret was one of the founding members of the Trust in 1992 and had served in her quiet and effective way on Council up till her death. We will miss her sense of humour and good sense in conducting our business. I greatly regret that Margaret's name appears on your papers tonight as standing for re-election. This a most embarrassing mistake for which I as Chairman take full responsibility. I take this opportunity to express my apologies for any distress this may have caused to Margaret's family and friends in the Trust.**

On a less sombre note I am pleased to report that the Trust has enjoyed another active year in 2009 -10. Our Treasurer's report to the AGM indicates that our finances remain sound and that our membership numbers are steady and even slightly increasing.

The highpoint of the year was the conference we held last October at Weston Park on the Future of Trees in Historic Parks. A capacity audience from across the Midlands and further afield heard speakers from a variety of specialisms, some of them national or international experts in their field, explain the myriad threats parkland trees face from disease, climate change, and inappropriate management practice and the steps that can be taken to try and redress this. It was a most stimulating and informative day which we hope has influenced wider thinking on tree management among those who attended. Our thanks are due to the Weston Park Foundation who kindly allowed us to use their conference facilities in the stableblock and gave us the run of the park for our afternoon visits.

On the planning side the Trust has continued to be consulted on a number of draft local development framework documents by local authorities. We have had little to say on them as most of them have been Core Strategies – overall high level policies not affecting historic parks. Indeed, it has become clear during the year that the new style LDFs are not allowed to include the detailed guidance on things like historic parks which were a feature of the previous generation of local plans. Such guidance now has to be relegated to separate lower level documents called Supplementary Planning Documents and few authorities have got round to preparing any yet. However, help is at hand for the conservation world, as the new Planning Policy Guidance note PPS5 published by the government in March now puts the onus on developers of all notified heritage assets including historic parks to show how their proposals will affect the significance of these sites and for local planning authorities to refuse permission if the development will cause significant harm. We wait to see how this new guidance will pan out in practice, although early signs are that it will be beneficial to the conservation cause.

Our Archivist reports that 3 new sites have been added to our Inventory during the year including Priory Park, Dudley. Information has been received about an early formal garden at Wrinehill Hall, near Betley, of which only part of the moat now remains. This was the home of the Egerton family before they moved to Tatton. Our inventory now covers 441 sites. The level of information varies

considerably and many sites have disappeared. Additions to the list are often not the result of research but local knowledge. If any member stumbles upon any information however slight we would be pleased to know. It can be as simple as an advertisement for a nursing home converted from a historic house, old photograph, family history or a newspaper article.

We have responded to requests for information from Godalming Museum which holds copy plans by Gertrude Jekyll on Little Aston Hall; and from a researcher on the work in Staffordshire of Milner White in the late 19th century (this includes Rangemore Hall, Sandon Hall & Hartshill Cemetery).

The year has been notable for the publication of two important books on Staffordshire parks. The Staffordshire edition in the Redcliffe Press series The Historic Gardens of England by Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre was published in September. Enville, Hagley and The Leasowes, Three Great Eighteenth Century Gardens by Sandy Haynes and Michael Symes was launched in May by the same publisher. Both books have added greatly to our understanding of the county's great wealth of historic gardens. The Trust was pleased to have helped with research for the Staffordshire volume by giving access to our archives.

Good progress continues to be made by the small group working on recreating the small garden known as the Monks Walk in Lichfield; more volunteers are always welcome to join their practical working parties.

On the Activities side we followed up last year's very successful AGM at Enville with "A Day in Cheshire", visiting Mellors Garden, the unique Victorian allegorical garden, and Gawsworth Hall near Maccelsfield. Closer to home we visited Little Onn Hall, a garden by Thomas Mawson, and enjoyed the second part of three tours of Shugborough led by Joe Hawkins, the Head Gardener, and new member of the Trust's Council. Joe is offering a further visit this autumn to view the outer limits of the park including Hadrian's Arch.

Our autumn talks programme attracted substantial audiences to hear Dianne Barre give us insights into her researching the book on Staffordshire's historic gardens. David Jacques talked about his researches into sixteenth-century plants as one of the team engaged in creating The Elizabethan Garden at Kenilworth Castle, which many of us visited under his guidance last weekend.

Two issues of the Newsletter have been published, both substantial in content,

combining reports and original research articles. The Editor is greatly indebted to those members whose contributions made their publication possible.

The 2010 programme of visits is well underway. Kenilworth has been mentioned. We have also visited Sandwell Park Farm and Dartmouth Park, at West Bromwich under the guidance of Council member Margaret Foster, one of the team responsible for preparing the successful Lottery bid for funding the regeneration of the park. A visit to The National Arboretum has been arranged for next month. Many of the places visited by the Trust are, of course, open to the public but by joining the organised visits members enjoy the added bonus of being taken round by knowledgeable guides who can often impart a lot of behind the scenes information which can add so much to our appreciation of a park.

It is always my pleasure at the AGM to thank many people for their commitment and hard work in supporting the Trust and its activities over the past year. Our thanks to our President, Sir Patrick Cormack, for his very active support and encouragement throughout the year and for chairing the proceedings tonight. As you will all know, Sir Patrick stood down from Parliament at the General Election after a long and very distinguished parliamentary career. We wish him all the best in his retirement and hope, now he is freed from the cares of state, that he and Lady Cormack may be able to join us on some more of our activities during the coming years.

As always our thanks extend to our Company Secretary, Hayden Baugh-Jones, and his team at South Staffordshire District Council for all their quiet work behind the scenes running the day to day administration of the Trust; to the District Council for allowing them the time to do this and for continuing to host our company address. To our Treasurer for his work in masterminding our finances and ensuring we remain solvent and prudent in our expenditure. My special thanks are due to all my colleagues on the Trust's Council for their continued input and support; and also to yourselves our members without whose interest and encouragement we would not be able to continue. And finally as every year I cannot let the moment pass without a special thanks offered to Bryan Sullivan, who tirelessly organises our Council meetings, takes our minutes, produces the newsletter and organises our varied and always interesting programme of events.

**Alan Taylor**