



# Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

Published by the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust. c/o South Staffordshire Council, Wolverhampton Road, Codsall, Staffordshire WV8 1PX. Tel: 01902 696000

# News LETTER

## Thomas Wright and The Shepherd's Monument

“one of the most romantic of English garden buildings”

**A small party of members gathered at Shugborough one Saturday afternoon in September for a talk given by Joe Hawkins, Head Gardener and a member of the Council's Council of Management, on Thomas Wright, “The Wizard of Durham”, the tercentenary of whose birth fell this year.**

Joe began by briefly recalling the route he had taken the previous year on his epic sponsored walk from Byers Green, Wright's birthplace, back to Shugborough, during which he had visited as many places associated with Thomas Wright as possible, staying overnight at many of them.

At Shugborough, Wright was attributed with the responsibility for The Cat's Monument, The Ruin, other architectural details visible in Moses Griffiths' painting of The Chinese House, and the layout of the original eighteenth-century garden, as well as for the bay fronts at either end of the mansion, a design feature also to be found at Hampton Court.

The Ruin was built from stone from the earlier mansion. Once far more extensive and including a pigeon house and colonnade, it was washed away by floods at the end of the eighteenth century. The Druid, a popular eighteenth-century symbol of a pre-classical native culture, was once a complete figure, but was, Joe believed, damaged by a falling tree (and not, as tradition would have it, by Thomas Anson seeking to create a more authentic ruin in his landscape!).

William Nessfield planned a huge parterre for this part of the gardens, which would have involved the removal of The Ruin but would almost certainly have been ruined the next time the river

overflowed, a good example, in Joe's opinion, of what will happen if garden designers do not follow the advice of Alexander Pope and ‘consult the genius of the place’.

Perhaps his best-known creation, though, was the first stage of The Shepherd's Monument, the inner rusticated arch, the design for which was taken straight from his two-volume architectural pattern book, “Arbours and Grottoes”. James ‘Athenian’ Stuart later enclosed this arch with classical columns surmounted by a pediment, an architectural device known as an *aedicule* or “little building”. Anthemions line the top of Stuart's Monument, while, between the metopes, or discs, which now line the top of the Monument, are laurel wreaths, two of which are inscribed with the face of Pan.

At the centre of the monument is a bas relief, a sculptural relief in which the figures or design extend only slightly from the background, by the notable Flemish sculptor, Peter Scheemakers. The memorial busts of George and Elizabeth Anson which appear on either side of a central apulstra representing the bow of a ship and the spoils of war are also Scheemaker's work, though his best known monument is probably William Shakespeare's monument in Westminster Abbey.

The Shepherd's Monument now stands as an example of a *memento mori*, that is, a



Shepherd's Monument

reminder of Man's mortality and of the brevity and fragility of human life, a message reinforced by the choice of decoration such as cypress boughs and laurel wreaths, traditional symbols of mortality.

Previous to the Great Flood, after which the River Trent was diverted further from the house, the Monument stood closer to the river; the sound of the wind blowing through the reeds would have evoked the sound of Pan's pipes, while the river itself would have stood in for the River Styx, across which, in Greek mythology, the ferryman Charon ferried dead souls.

Supporting this melancholy interpretation is the possibility that the Monument may once have been the entrance to or the window looking into a chamber holding a sarcophagus before the relief was inserted; certainly, there is evidence that it may have once have been attached to walls – or might it, in its earliest form, have been an entrance to the kitchen garden?

Certainly, the Monument continues to invoke strong opinion and encourage controversy. Was it, as Joe believes, in its time at the cutting edge of modern architectural design, employing

successively the talents of three of the leading designers of the age – or is it “an unsatisfactory composition of poorly integrated parts”, as described by Eileen Harris in her article in “Arcadia” which appeared in the edition of 6th August 2007?

But by far the most controversial aspect of the Monument is undoubtedly the enigmatic inscription at its foot. Do the letters reveal the hidden locality of The Holy Grail? Or are they based on Genesis chapter 50, verse 25 (like the relief, inscribed in reverse)? Are they a tribute to a recently-dead, dearly-loved sister? Or are they a secret message to two lovers? All these interpretations have been offered!

Do not be discouraged if you remain baffled – so were Josiah Wedgwood, Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin! Even the code-breakers from Bletchley Park have failed to decipher the meaning!

In celebration of Wright's three-hundredth anniversary, the planting that had begun to encroach on the monument has been removed, and a new scheme more sympathetic to the monument's era and concept is being implemented. With no period planting plans existing and only



Shepherd's Monument Entablature

some scant historic descriptions to go on, the plants have been chosen to echo the Monument's iconography and reflect more typical eighteenth century planting. The inclusion of native species will also extend the potential for wildlife habitat and increase the Estate's biodiversity.

For more information on this project go to: [thelandscape-disciple.blogspot.com](http://thelandscape-disciple.blogspot.com).

*One of the Trust's objectives is to help safeguard historic parks and gardens from inappropriate change. Our Development Group regularly comments on planning applications affecting historic parks or on local authorities' draft planning policies. This article discusses two recent cases where the Trust has taken a particularly active stance in objecting to proposals for wind turbine developments affecting views from historic parks in Staffordshire.*

## TRUST OBJECTS TO TWO WIND TURBINE DEVELOPMENTS

**We are all aware today of the threat that climate change presents to the environment and keen to support new forms of low or no-carbon energy generation. Unfortunately, some of the new technologies can pose their own problems of local environmental threat which have to be balanced against any wider benefits of environmental sustainability. Inland wind turbines are a particular case in point and frequently stimulate public concerns about potentially harmful effects on local residential amenity, attractive countryside and heritage sites including historic parks.**

In the last 18 months the Trust has objected to two planning applications for wind turbines in South Staffordshire which it considered would have an adverse impact on historic parks. The first proposal was to erect two wind turbines at Whittington just below Kinver Edge and in full view from the prehistoric hill fort and surrounding National Trust land. Our concern was that the 132 metre tall three bladed turbines would be

readily visible in the views between the historic parks at Enville and Hagley Halls, views that despite the growth of the nearby Black Country had changed relatively little in the two and half centuries since the parks were laid out.

Although the application was refused planning permission by South Staffordshire Council the developers appealed and a public inquiry was held last August. Joe Hawkins, a member of our Council of Management, presented the Trust's case very eloquently at the Inquiry reinforcing similar objections from English Heritage and Lord Cobham, the owner of Hagley Hall. The Planning Inspector who heard the Inquiry rejected the appeal primarily on the grounds of harm to the Green Belt and to views from Kinver Hillfort. Although he took note of the Trust's arguments about the intrusive nature of the proposed development in views between Enville and Hagley and noted that 18th century diarists had commented on this intervisibility he laid less weight on these objections, as there was no clear documentary evidence to show

the views were intentional and not just a happy coincidence of geography. Although the Trust is disappointed that the garden history objections were played down we are delighted that the application was refused planning permission and that the historic views will remain uninterrupted.

Another application to erect six 126 metre tall turbines at Brineton to the north of Weston under Lizard was also refused planning permission by South Staffordshire Council earlier this year. These turbines will be visible in views across the grade II\* registered Weston Park from the Knoll, the ridge at the south end of the historic landscape, where they will be a highly intrusive feature in countryside little changed for 150 years. The developers have appealed against refusal of planning permission and a public inquiry will be held in February. The Trust was too late to object to the original planning application but will be appearing at the inquiry to argue that the development would have a harmful effect on views from historic Weston Park.

# “On a foggy afternoon in mid-November...”

...a party of members and friends visited Alton Towers and were given a guided tour of the gardens by the Archivist, Di Jones, and Mark Kerrigan, Park Operations and Development Director.

Also accompanying the party were Julie Deacon, Mark's Personal Assistant, who handled the arrangements for the visit; Alan Taylor, Chairman of the Trust, and Sarah Ashmead, past Chairman of the Trust and consultant architect to the Alton Towers Heritage Committee, whose role is to ensure that new attractions do not compromise the historic integrity of the site.

Before the tour started, the group were given a printed handout prepared by Sarah which set out the significance of the Gardens and their historical context.

From this they learnt that Alton Towers was built between 1810 and 1852 for the fifteenth and sixteenth Earls of Shrewsbury on the site of a summer retreat known as "Alveston Lodge". The house was renamed "Alton Abbey" in 1811 and "Alton Towers" in 1832.

The gardens and woodland walks were created by the fifteenth Earl and further developed by the sixteenth Earl with the help of architects and gardeners.

J. C. Loudon visited the gardens in 1826, 1831 and 1840, and, although he was critical of what he saw (he thought the buildings too numerous and varied in style), he was also struck by the 'grand and picturesque' character of the valley which had been greatly enhanced by the fifteenth Earl, who, in the words inscribed at the foot of the Choragic Monument erected in his honour by his nephew and successor, the sixteenth Earl, truly "made the desert smile".

By 1840 the manuscript catalogue of plants described a great diversity of planting in the gardens and some indications that the maturity of the gardens was already obscuring some intended views. The balance between conserving the diverse framework of planting, protection and restoration of the listed structural elements and maintaining dramatic views continues to preoccupy the present-day managers of the gardens.

Described by Loudon as "one of the most singular anomalies to be met with among the residences of Britain", the experience of

visiting Alton Towers is to be presented with unfolding and set-piece views, set out in order to show off the full effect of the wide diversity of elements in the gardens. They are a proliferation of 'incident' similar in vein to a modern Theme Park, each designed to surprise, amaze and enthral the visitor, and they represent as good an example as one could hope to find of an eclectic, exotic and deeply romantic nineteenth-century designed landscape.

The gardens were opened to the public at the time of the fifteenth Earl and, as their fame spread, the crowds had by the 1890's increased to up to 30,000 a day on special fête days. Garden-related attractions swelled the crowds, and special acts were brought in to entertain and amaze the visitors.

After the death of the twentieth Earl in 1921 the Towers was bought by a local businessman and opened on a commercial basis from 1924. The status of "Pleasure Ground" was confirmed by a Certificate of Established Use in 1981. The transformation of Alton Towers into a theme park occurred from the early 1980's, and continuing investment had been made up to the present day.

Alton Towers is Listed Grade I on the English Heritage Register. The wider estate is within the area covered by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, and there are a number of designations protecting the landscape of Alton Towers, including the Alton Farley Conservation Area, Special Landscape Area and County Site of Biological Importance.

Supplementary Planning Guidance for Alton Towers prepared in 1988 sets out the principles of allowing economic development of the site as a visitor attraction of national importance, whilst conserving and protecting its heritage interest and preventing impacts beyond the park.

Their understanding enhanced by this information and accompanied by such a wealth of first-hand knowledge and personal expertise, the group set off on a tour of the gardens led by Di and Mark, and the extent of the resources devoted to restoring and

maintaining the gardens soon became obvious. £300,000 has recently been spent on re-roofing the House Conservatory, while to restore the Banqueting Hall window, regarded as the finest Pugin glass outside Westminster Cathedral and now undergoing restoration by Hardiman's of Birmingham, will cost £90,000.

Even restoring her Ladyship's Oratory, a stone building smaller than the average garden shed, cost £40,000, so it is not hard to imagine the dismay that was felt when, scarcely a month later, a seventy-foot pine contemporaneous with the Oratory, fell on it, completely flattening it and necessitating further expenditure!

Water features are a prominent attraction of the Gardens and are supplied from two boreholes within the estate and from gravity lakes in the nearby Weaver Hills. Maintaining these attractions has involved expensive draining and dredging.

More work needs to be done. The aim of the present ongoing restoration programme is essentially to re-create the fifteenth Earl's vision, lost over the years as gardens designed to be maintained were neglected. To achieve this, trees which have been allowed to grow till they now block the views must be gradually and at the appropriate time removed and the sweeping lawns which gave the Gardens the impression of space restored.

But all this will, of course, require time and the continuous availability of resources. However, what was evident by the conclusion of the tour was that the task of returning the Gardens to their earlier glory is in the hands of people who have the knowledge, sensitivity and determination to achieve this aim.

The visit ended in The Towers Suite, where the group were handsomely refreshed, and our thanks go to Di, Mark, Sarah and Alan for providing us with insights into the weighty responsibilities of managing an historic garden of which the average visitor to Alton Towers, there for the thrills, who hardly ever enters the gardens, would be unaware.

## STAFFORDSHIRE HISTORY DAY

**The Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service, Keele University and The Centre for West Midlands History at the University of Birmingham are combining to present the first Staffordshire History Day, which will take place at the Kingston Centre, Stafford, on Saturday, February 4th, 2012.**

Keynote speakers will be Dr. Malcolm Dick whose talk will be on James Keir, (1735-1820), the Scottish chemist, geologist, industrialist, inventor and member of The Lunar Society of Birmingham, and Andrew Sargent, whose subject will be "The Lands of St. Chad". Dr. Nigel Tringham, Staffordshire Editor of the Victorian County History series, will talk about the forthcoming volume.

There will also be the latest archaeological news and updates on

post-graduate research and from museums and local societies. The Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust will be amongst local societies with displays at the event.

The event will run from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., and tickets are available now from the Staffordshire Record Office, Eastgate Street, Stafford, at a cost of £17.00 each.

This will include lunch and light refreshments. Parking will be free.

# The Mughal Gardens of India

David started his talk by modestly declaring that he wasn't speaking as any sort of expert on Indian Gardens but had visited them as a tourist (but as a tourist with the eye of a garden historian, David!).

Rajasthan, once known as "The State of Warriors", is where the great raja palaces are to be found. The majority were started under the rule of the Mughals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their builders benefited from the presence of two materials found in the area – sandstone and a form of marble known as Makrana marble. The first of these was incredibly strong and could be split into planks, and it was so widely distributed in the area that it was used for steps, ceiling and even fencing; while Makrana marble is the finest marble in the world and is completely flawless.

In Rajasthan, camels are still an important form of commercial transport. Elephants were once used for transporting the rajas to war and to the hunt, but, nowadays, they carry tourists instead! Buffalos, as well as being used for haulage, provide dung which, when dried, is used for fuel and is the main source of cooking.

The Mughals arrived in India in the twelfth century and, at the height of their power, their empire stretched from Central India to the borders of Persia (now Iran). At first choosing Agra as their capital, they later moved to Delhi, and in these places can be found the celebrated garden tombs, the most famous of which is, of course, the Taj Mahal in Agra. In addition courtyard gardens laid out within palaces, some for the raja and his guests, some for the harem.

Water played an enormous part in Indian gardens, which were divided into quarters by channels linked to a rill running down the central axis. Wall paintings show the garden as a walled refuge from the turbulent, often violent, world outside. Inside, a pool stood at the centre of a shaded garden planted with palm trees and full of fruit. Laid out in an otherwise dry landscape, where, in the summer, temperatures reached 40°C,

these gardens would quite literally have been oases of luxury.

The water needed for irrigation had to be brought to a high level, but, unfortunately, the water systems on which these gardens were so dependent have in very many cases been allowed to collapse, and, as a result, grass has replaced the orchards and orange groves.

Of the palaces themselves, some have been well preserved, while some have fallen into ruins, in many cases, victim of political changes whereby palaces are no longer the centres of agricultural estates. Of those which have survived, many, like the Maharajah of Jodhpur's place at Balamaund, have been turned into luxury hotels, though, in some of the smaller, less luxurious establishments, David and Karen detected a patronising attitude in the owner amounting, at times, to resentment that a decline in the family's fortunes had made entering the hospitality industry necessary.

An undoubted highlight of the tour (according to Karen, *the* highlight of the tour) was the visit to the Taj Mahal, built between 1632 and 1653 to the design of Persian architects (as David had earlier pointed out, Persian influence on Mughal architecture had been very strong). Built in marble, its exterior was once as colourful as its interior still is, but has been bleached by centuries of sunshine. However, this has given it an added beauty, since the bleached marble changes colour throughout the day as it catches the changing colour of the sky. Here, too, the fruit trees have been replaced by grass.



Deeg gardens

gardens of Kesar Kyari Bagh at Amber, restored in 1994 and again in 2008, are a sincere attempt at restoration, though the remains of the original gardens were lost in the process; and a long border in the garden at the Taj Mahal, laid out in a more geometrical style favoured by the Persians, is believed to have been restored by the British on actual evidence.

While India values its architectural heritage, and has an organisation called "The Archaeological Survey of India", similar to our own English Heritage, there didn't seem to be the same importance attached to historic gardens, and guides, more interested in the country's history and architecture, showed very little knowledge about the gardens. The country has no garden historians similar to those found in the Western World. Similarly, horticulture does not seem to rank highly as a profession, and, though there are armies of gardeners, they are regarded simply as labourers.

On the other hand, public gardens like that at Deeg, once a traditional palace garden, are enormously popular, and David and Karen were also intrigued to see several gardens specifically laid out for weddings; these covered a huge area in order to cater for the vast crowds which attended weddings in India, which often lasted three days. However, the lush gardens they saw in the suburbs of Delhi belonged to the international set; in the rural areas, where eighty per cent of the population lived, land was needed to grow food.

While there is very little ornamental horticulture, there is a good deal of topiary in the Delhi suburbs. They are, however, not very colourful; in fact, the only displays of colourful flowers that David and Karen saw were on roundabouts! This absence of colour in Indian gardens does not mean that Indians do not enjoy colour; on the



Kesar Kyari Bagh restored 1994 & 2008

Generally, it was, David said, difficult to judge how far the restored gardens they saw such as at Amber, one of the principal tourist attractions in Jaipur, were genuine or simply the work of someone who was imagining what he thought might have been there previously. Certainly, the



contrary, their textiles are bright and vibrant, and they even paint their elephants before they take part in parades and processions!

Summing up their experiences of India, David said that, while sixty per cent of the population lived their lives in the traditional way, he believed that most

were contented, but there were already signs that, within the next ten to fifteen years, this contentment would be compromised by consumerism as the Indian economy grew and material possessions such as a television set became increasingly desirable.

No written account could do justice to

the fascination of the subject and the relaxed yet professional way in which the talk was given, yet I hope that this account will convey at least some idea of the quality of the evening, for which David and Karen must be thanked most warmly.

W. B. S.

## William Cobbett (1763-1835)

***You may have heard of William Cobbett as a political writer and social reformer; less well known however is that he wrote books on gardening.***

According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, he worked as a ploughboy and gardener in his youth before enlisting in the army. Upon his discharge, he wrote the first of many controversial pamphlets and was obliged to leave the country. He lived first in France and then in the USA until a libel case caused him to return to England and to begin his career as a political activist. In addition to his political writing, he wrote 'The American Gardener' in 1821 and 'The English Gardener' in 1829.

'The English Gardener' is fairly typical of gardening manuals of the time, but Cobbett clearly could not resist peppering it with opinions in his typical forthright way. He obviously did not care if he offended anyone, and it is this which makes the book an interesting read.

On the subject of seeds, he explains that many purchased seeds were not viable, and he gives advice on testing seed to see if it is sound, concluding 'find a seedsman who does not deceive you and stick to him'. He goes on to explode the myth that melon seed needs to be old: 'English authors published it and French authors laughed at it more than a

century past'... 'how are we to find the conscience to blame a gardener for errors inculcated by gentlemen of erudition'. He then goes on to lambast the practice of sowing by the moon, 'I do hope it is unnecessary for me to say that sowing according to the moon is wholly absurd and ridiculous and that it arose solely out of the circumstance that our forefathers who could not read, had neither almanack nor calendar to guide them and who counted by moons and festivals'.

Cobbett clearly had a low opinion of gardeners. He describes an incident when his own gardener sowed the peas too close and then refused to take out every other row. When the crop was destroyed by heavy rain, Cobbett declares that this was 'of precious advantage for it made me master of my gardener, a thing that happens to very few owners of gardens'.

Not content with annoying the entire race of seedsmen, garden owners and gardeners regarding seed sowing, he turned his attention to fruit cultivation, in which he said the French 'excel all the world in every thing that they undertake to cultivate; they beat all

gentlemen's gardeners in the kingdom... I have leaned more from them than from all the books that I have read in my life and from all that I ever saw practised in gentlemen's gardens'. However, he did have a little praise to bestow, as he writes that in September he had seen, 'the finest dishes of strawberries that I ever saw in my life in Wolseley Park - plants in full bearing with ripe strawberries on the runners of that same summer... a bed of these strawberries surpasses all others in fragrance and flavour, as to size they were a great deal larger than the common scarlet strawberry'.

The praise was brief; just a few pages later he writes that grass mowing can only be done in the dew, 'if you do not resolve to have the thing done in this manner it is much better not to attempt it all. The decay of gardening in England in this respect is quite surprising'.

One wonders if he sold many gardening books at all!

S.V.Gregory

# TWO VISITS TO BIDDULPH GRANGE

***“The exceptional gardens at Biddulph Grange in Staffordshire are a wonder to behold”***

**Members of the Trust paid two visits this summer to Biddulph Grange, one of the great gardens of Staffordshire and the United Kingdom to learn about different aspects of its history, layout and underlying philosophy.**

The first of these was led by Paul Baker, formerly Estate Manager, who took a small party round the garden pointing out its salient features and providing the background to their history. The tour ended in the newly-restored Geological Gallery, whose significance in the understanding of the garden he explained.

James Bateman, who created the garden between 1837 and 1860, was a strong evangelical in an area where Primitive Methodism was particularly strong, and believed, like most of his contemporaries, in the doctrine of creation as described in the first book of Genesis. However, there was also a recognition that there was a need to reconcile this belief with the scientific discoveries of the age which were making it increasingly difficult to accept the Biblical version as a literal account, and Bateman's contribution to this debate was the setting up of the Geological Gallery.

While geology was still in its infancy, it had already gone a long way towards discrediting the orthodoxy first propounded by James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, who, in the mid 1650s, published a chronology which claimed to show that the

universe had been created in 4004 BC, his calculations being based on the genealogies of the Old Testament.

Bateman subscribed to the view, as propounded by William Buckland, leading theologian, eminent geologist (he was Oxford University's first Reader in Mineralogy) and eccentric (he claimed to have tasted the flesh of every known animal, as well as eaten the embalmed heart of Louis XIV), that there had been a series of geological periods, each ended by a cataclysmic event, such as The Flood, which had eliminated all existing living forms and been followed by the emergence of new forms of animals and plants.

Each of the seven days of Creation should now be seen as a metaphor for one of these geological periods. To illustrate this, Bateman lined the walls of the gallery, a corridor leading from an entrance porch into the garden, with a series of seven panels marking the seven days of Creation, in each of which was embedded groups of fossils depicting a particular geological age (Sadly, none remains in place; some are stored at Biddulph and at Keele, but the majority have been lost, and the gallery itself was

shortened when the house was converted into a hospital). Fragments from bygone classical and Central American civilisations displayed in the waiting room prepared visitors for the world view that Bateman wished his garden to convey.

“China” and “Egypt”, key themed areas in his garden, were reminders of past civilisations which had come and gone in the course of Man's progress towards The Second Coming of Christ, this time as Judge of the World, when the righteous would receive their reward and the wicked their punishment (Some had thought that this would occur in 1844, and its failure to do so later became known as “The Great Disappointment”).

Given that Bateman's purpose behind the creation of the garden at Biddulph might well have been to illustrate Bateman's religious convictions, the practice of labelling trees might also have been intended not merely to educate in the general sense but to illustrate the wonderful fecundity of God's Creation, while a group of dead trees inverted to expose their roots, regarded by some as grotesque, may have been intended



***“And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet”: Revelations 16:13***

to demonstrate the sophisticated system on which a tree depended for a healthy life (On the other hand, they might simply have been put there to provide support for a climbing plant!).

Visitors often get the impression that the gardens they see have been laid out according to a master plan, though not many visitors will take a guess as what that master plan might be. Certainly, as they park their cars, few will realise that the car park was once the glebe field, nor, when they walk along Lime Avenue, that this was once the main road past the house.

Garden design is, of course, an evolutionary process; as improvements are sought or further potential recognised, changes are made. Sometimes original plans were not completed or were amended. At Biddulph, some aspects of China were never realised; the original dahlia garden was where the parterre now is; the Sikkim rhododendron originally planted in what is now known as "The Glen" did not thrive and were moved to the Rhododendron House.

"Egypt" was inspired by a visit to The Great Exhibition of 1851, the four sphinxes being a later addition (carved from local stone, they each bear a cartouche which, when translated by an authority on hieroglyphics, were found to read "Made in Stoke-on-Trent"!).

For over twenty years, Bateman, drawing on a reservoir of inherited wealth derived from engineering and mining, brought to Biddulph a remarkable variety of plants, shrubs and trees and filled it with a range of exotic buildings until the huge amount of money needed to sustain his vision grew beyond even his resources, and he and his wife, her health impaired by the damp Staffordshire weather, withdrew to the warmer climate of Worthing, on the South Coast, where he once again set about creating a rockwork garden, though on a much smaller scale.

In 1871, their son, John Bateman sold the estate to Robert Heath, a prominent Staffordshire industrialist, who continued to maintain and

enhance the garden, particularly in the introduction of hollies. But perhaps the most dramatic moment in the history of the house during Heath's ownership occurred in 1896, when it was devastated by a fire which left only the original wings and the gallery standing. Heath went on to rebuild the house in the Victorian Italianate style made fashionable by Osborne House, on the Isle of Wight.

In 1921, the Heath family donated the house and estate to The North Staffordshire Cripples Aid Society, and Biddulph was launched on a new phase of its history as an orthopaedic hospital made world-famous by the renowned Sir Harry Platt.

In 1948, the hospital became part of the New National Health Service and, understandably, given the cost involved, maintaining the garden was not a first priority. Nonetheless, their therapeutic value to patients was recognised and within their limited budget the gardening staff maintained the site in remarkably good condition. In the 1970s the health authority announced its intention to close the hospital, putting a big question mark over the future of the historic estate. Three of the later founder-members of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust helped to raise the public profile of the estate and the need to preserve it, leading in 1981 to the Staffordshire Moorlands Council acquiring the entire Biddulph Grange estate, including what is now the Biddulph Grange Country Park, in order to ensure its future protection (The mansion house was leased back to the health authority between 1981 and the closure of the hospital in the early 1990s, when it was sold to a developer for conversion to apartments).

A grant from The National Heritage Memorial Fund enabled The National Trust to buy the ornamental gardens, and, after a period of surveying and stock-taking, the Trust set about restoring the garden to its former glory, beginning by reclaiming the dahlia garden, filled in when an extension was added to the hospital.

The second visit, led by Alan Taylor, was to Biddulph Grange Country Park, the part of the estate retained

by the District Council. Alan explained that the full extent of the original Bateman estates around Biddulph included not only Biddulph Grange and park but also Knypersley Hall, Greenway Bank and Biddulph Old Hall, all connected by a network of private carriageways (and all purchased to proclaim the family's prosperity and to acquire the mineral rights which were the basis of the family's wealth).

To the average visitor, Biddulph County Park, seventy-three acres in extent, offers woodland walks of varying gradients crowned by magnificent views across beautiful Staffordshire countryside. On our second visit, we were shown features which were typical of Bateman's landscape style. A revetted stream, its banks reinforced with stonework; a Grade II listed stone bridge; a rock alcove seat; and steps carved out of rock formation leading to a viewpoint looking out over Biddulph Moor and across the Cheshire Plain towards Merseyside. Elsewhere were remnants of the hydro-electric plant built by Robert Heath to supply power to Biddulph Grange (Obviously a man who learnt from experience, Heath also installed a lake in the upper part of the park and a series of fire hydrants in the house!).

Our tour took in the Obelisk Ride, a steep, tree-lined sandy avenue which continued the straight walk from the house terrace by Mrs. Bateman's boudoir up to the Wellingtonia Avenue, terminating in a cave which provided the way to work for the estate villagers who lived in the countryside beyond. Seen from the house, the steepness of the path, the sandy surface and the narrowing of the perspective into the distance all gave the illusion of a masonry obelisk, hence its historic name.

The Trust is grateful to both Paul and Alan for providing two such fascinating and memorable visits. A special thanks is due to Paul and the staff of the tea room at Biddulph Grange who provided the cream tea at the end of that visit.

# The Complete Vermin Killer

If an 18th century gardener needed advice on ridding his garden of pests, he could consult 'The Complete Vermin Killer or The Compendious Gardener And Husbandman' published in 1777.

'Bugs which damage plants' could be destroyed by sprinkling 'the places where they lodge with juice of Henbane infused in strong Vinegar' or by 'watering the plants on which they settle with the cold decoction of Mustard and Laurel seed mixed with Water'.

Should he be plagued with Vine-Fretters he could 'stick a rod half a foot high in the ground with Mugs or Cups turned over the top of it and they will creep under for shelter and so be easily taken'. Similarly, if the gardener's carnations were being eaten by earwigs he was instructed to hang the claws of lobsters and crabs around the plants as traps. No alternative is given for those living in land-locked counties. If the damage was caused by ants, the gardener could fire the nests or 'lay a quantity of human ordure upon them'. Alternatively, this could be laid around the root or stem.

Caterpillars must have been a great nuisance, judging by the space devoted to remedies:

'It is generally known how destructive Caterpillars are to the Leaves of Trees, to Cabbages and almost all other Vegetables Their numerous increase on Trees may be prevented by gathering them off in Winter, taking away the prickets that cleave to the branches and throwing them in the fire. Another method is to rub Tar round the bottom of your tree then putting a number of Ants in a bag, hang them so that they may touch the body of the tree and the Tar will prevent the Ants from getting down and thus they will devour the Caterpillars for want of other food.

To destroy Caterpillars on Cabbages and Coleworts [kale] some people sprinkle salt Water over them and this is often found to be effectual but if this does not answer mix an equal quantity of the lees of Oil and the urine of an Ox boil them together and when cold sprinkle it on

the Herbs and Plants and it will destroy them.

Some kill them by sprinkling the Trees or Plants with Water in which field Crabs [apples] have been steeped after being bruised. Brimstone burnt among the Trees will also destroy them.

Gardeners shake them off their Plants in a morning for they will readily fall before they have recovered from the cold of the night. An easy method of catching Caterpillars is to bind whisps of Hay or Straw about your Trees There are various kinds of Caterpillars but the most hurtful are the Wolf and Calendar worm which conceal themselves in the hearts of the Flower buds closing them up so that the leaves cannot display themselves and totally destroying them, the Trees which are early blowers appear as if they had been singed by lightning those that blow late are less liable to be thus infected'.

The greatest problem for the gardener and husbandman, however, was caused by rats and mice, and there were many methods of destruction which appear to us today as quite gruesome. Some of the less shocking are:

'To the Powder of Arsenic add fresh Butter made into a paste with Wheat or Barley meal and Honey. Spread pieces of this mixture about those parts of the house they mostly frequent they will eagerly eat of it and when they have so done will drink till they burst. As this is a strong poison you must use it with caution and always wash your hands afterwards.

Oatmeal and powdered Glass only or add to them some fresh Butter and lay near their haunts or filings of Iron mixed with Oatmeal or Dough or Oatmeal flour will have the same effect.

Fry a piece of rusty Bacon and lay it in

the middle of a board three feet square covering the board pretty thick with Bird lime only leaving some narrow alleys in the board for the Mice or Rats to get at the Bacon in doing which they will frequently get among the lime and be caught. In Staffordshire it is customary to put Bird lime about their holes, and they running among it, it will stick to them so that they will not leave scratching till they kill themselves

When you have caught a Rat or Mouse cut or beat him severely and let him go and he will make such a crying noise that his companions will leave the place. Some persons say that laying the skin of a Deer in a room where they use to frequent will drive them away. If Hog's lard be mixed with the brains of a Weasel and distributed about a room in bits as big as a nut they will not come thither'.

The Compendious Gardener in 1777 could also control the weather. The book lists remedies for mist, fog, thunder, lightening or frost:-

'At the four corners of your garden or in the middle of it hang up the feathers of an Eagle or burn heaps of Shrubs, Weeds or Chaff and you will find them operate towards dispersing Mists or Fogs.

4 Pieces of Iron or Horse shoes hung on your trees are deemed efficacious against Thunder, Lightning or Blasts. The effects of Frosts are prevented by smoking Goat's or Cow's dung or Chaff in your garden.

Likewise a large Smoke made of Cow dung flying over your garden is said to be good against the effects of Rust or Vermin'.

What a very smelly place the garden must have been!

S. V. Gregory

## Significant Dates!

The dates of the 2012 Spring & Summer Programme will be sent to members shortly, but in the meantime members might like to put two significant dates in their diary:

Wednesday, May 23rd: Visit to London, ending with tea with the President, Lord Cormack, at the House of Lords

Friday, June 15th: Annual General Meeting at Whitmore House, by kind invitation of the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Cavenagh-Mainwaring.

Details of both these events will be sent to members in the New Year.