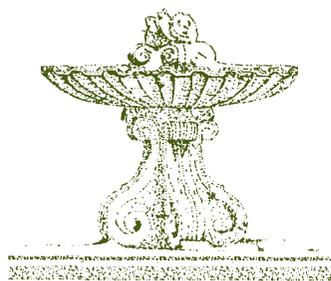


Newsletter of the
Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust.
Registered Charity No. 1013862.
SUMMER 2013 ISSUE No. 48



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

“THE OLDEST, BIGGEST AND BEST”

Thus, John Weston described the National Gardens Scheme, established as a charity since 1980, at the beginning of his talk to a well-supported meeting of the Trust which took place at the Haling Dene Centre, Penkridge, last December.

To trace the origins of the Scheme, which was founded in 1927, one has to go back to mid-Victorian times and meet the remarkable William Rathbone, who belonged to a wealthy family of Liverpool merchants and who sat in the House of Commons as

a Liberal MP for City and County for twenty-seven years.

He shared the view held by many of his class that wealth should be used as a means of carrying out philanthropic works. A view which he put into practice, when, following the death of his first wife after a long illness, he continued to employ the nurse who had tended her, he sent her into one of the poorest areas of the city to relieve the suffering of the destitute people living there and teach them the rudiments of healthy living.

This was at a time when immigrants escaping the Potato Famine in Ireland flocked into Liverpool and were dying in their thousands as a result of poor housing and sanitation, malnutrition and unclean water.

Shocked by her experience, the nurse, Mary Robinson, persuaded William Rathbone to continue and extend his support. He went further....

Aware of an acute need for trained nurses, he sought the advice of Florence Nightingale, who suggested that he might set up a nurses' training school, attached to the local hospital, and this was duly built.

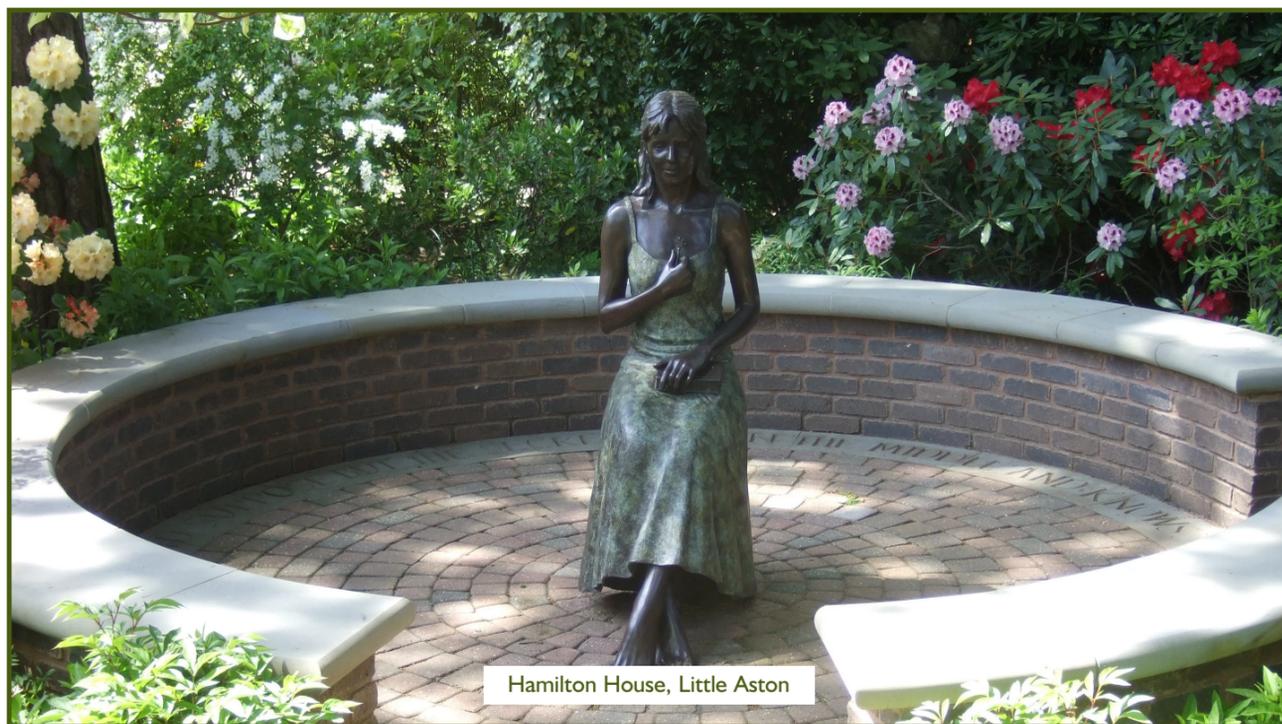
Already, an impetus was being created which could only gather in strength. What followed next was the organisation of the city into districts, each presided over by a Lady Superintendent and funded from the wealth of a local family. Soon, Liverpool's example was followed by other industrial cities, such as Manchester, Derby and Leicester, and thereafter the movement gathered momentum. Then, in 1889, the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses was set up by Royal Charter, funded by a grant of £70,000 from the Women's Jubilee Fund, money contributed by the women of England to mark the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The aim of the Institute was to provide "training, support, maintenance and supply" of nurses for the sick poor as well as to set national standards in training.

In 1927 the Institute became known as "The Queen's Institute of District Nursing", which, in turn, became "The Queen's Nursing Institute" (or the "QNI"), the name by which it is now known, and William Rathbone's pioneering work reached its fulfilment.



Birch Trees, Copmere End

continued overleaf



Hamilton House, Little Aston

It was to raise money for the Queen's Nursing Institute that the National Gardens Scheme was founded. In its first year, 609 private gardens "of quality and interest" were open to the public at a charge of a shilling (5p) a head, raising over £8000, a comparatively modest sum, perhaps, by modern standards but more substantial when viewed against the average annual income of the time.

Until the 1970s, the price of entry remained at a shilling a head, but, eventually, this had to be increased under pressure of inflation and, as a consequence, more substantial sums were raised.

In 1980 the National Gardens Scheme Charitable Trust was set up as an independent charity with Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother as its Patron and Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester, as its President, and the royal connection has remained unbroken ever since, the Prince of Wales being its present Patron. A total of 3800 gardens in England open under the Scheme each year, (Scotland has its own Scheme), and annual income from all sources averages £3½m, a total of £35m, having been raised since the inception of the Scheme. Last year, Staffordshire, Birmingham and the West Midlands region raised £66,223, down on the previous year's total

by ten per cent, a reflection of the economic times in which we live.

The charities supported by the NGS include Macmillan Cancer Relief, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Help the Hospices, Parkinson's UK and Crossroads Caring for Carers.

Have you ever wondered whether your garden could be included in the Scheme? Perhaps you think it might not measure up to the required standard? But do you know what that standard is? Size is not an essential requirement; the basic criteria are quality, character and interest, all very subjective judgments. Is your garden loved and cared for? Does it have horticultural interest? Is its design striking, innovative or original? These are characteristics that are not necessarily recognised by the owner.

There are also some more practical considerations; your garden should offer forty-five minutes of interest to its visitors (including time for a cup of tea!), and then there is the safety of the visitors to be considered. Are the paved pathways even and how steep are the slopes? Could the path leading to a significant part of the garden be narrow and result in congestion? And then, of course, there's the need for sufficient parking space. The NGS will, however, provide insurance for private gardens. The

first stage in enrolling in the Scheme will be a visit from John and Sue, who will come and have a look at your garden; this will be followed by a formal interview which has been described as "like an oral interview for Oxbridge" and "taking tea with the Queen"!

Once approved, your garden will join the more-than fifty gardens in Staffordshire that already open yearly to the public; these include such well-known places as Alton Towers, Biddulph Grange, Heath House, Middleton Hall, Sugnall Hall and The Wombourne Wodehouse.

The SGPT is proud to number some of its own members amongst the owners of gardens open under the NGS.

Members who visit these gardens will be supporting some noble causes, and, anyway, who could resist visiting a garden called "Paul's Oasis of Calm" (a garden "created from nothing into a little oasis") or "Small but Beautiful" (this garden is "just what it says it is")?

"Promoting the conservation and understanding of the county's rich heritage of designed landscapes"

Chairman's Report to the 2013 Annual General Meeting held at Wightwick Manor

I am delighted to see you all here this evening. We must thank the National Trust, who have made it possible to hold this AGM in such special surroundings.

I start as I always do by looking for new talent to help us on Council or in other ways of running the Trust. We are a voluntary body and depend on active members to help us carry out the Trust's educational, planning and member support activities. If you are interested, please have a word with any members of the Council who are here today or with myself. I have now been Chairman for seven years and, as I say every year, if anyone else fancies a shot at chairing the Trust, please don't be shy and step forward.

On the business front I am pleased to report that the Trust has enjoyed another active year in 2011-12. Our Treasurer's report to this meeting has indicated that our finances remain sound. It is pleasing to note a slight increase in our membership numbers. Please do encourage your friends and others with an interest in Staffordshire's gardens and parks to join us and help our work in promoting the conservation and understanding of the county's rich heritage of designed landscapes.

The Trust's website is now entering its third year, having gone live in January 2011. It contains information

about the Trust and how to join, our current and future activities, and will play an increasing role in how we communicate with members and the wider public in future years, both because that is the way of the world and because it is a useful way of keeping our costs down.

We have been recording statistics on the website's traffic since September 2012. This shows that, between September and December 2012, the website had 1025 visitors, but – straying into this year – to the end of April we have had 1124, so we are attracting more visitors, an average of 267 per month now compared to 256 last year. Visitors are coming to us from all over the world – in order, Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Sweden, the Czech Republic, China, Ukraine, France and South Africa!

More significantly, the website is starting to generate more Trust-related email interest, including several enquiries regarding potential visits or enquiries concerning conservation issues.

There is still work to do at home, though. A survey has just been completed by the web team to generate some ideas for Trust visits and activities. We took advantage of the initiative to try to see if anyone was interested in getting involved with the publishing of the Newsletter. The survey indicated that some Trust members were not aware that the Trust had a website! We shall need to address this again in future Newsletters.

The website is about to be re-launched. The new site will be easier to navigate, and any news will now feature on the main page. There will also be a "Features" section on the new site, the first one being information on the Capability

Brown Tercentenary 'CB300' initiative. It is planned that future "Features" might highlight sections from the current Newsletter or from past issues. So watch this space!

The website is still free of charge to the Trust, as it is part of a package that we have for hosting it. We owe a great debt of gratitude to Richard and Jackie Moseley, who have put the website together for us and manage it impeccably, with Jackie as "mailbox" and Richard as designer and editor. The site address is: www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org.

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 have had little or no heritage impact. Your Chairman has made contact with the local authority conservation officers and reminded them of the expertise in the Trust, but so far there have been few new planning issues affecting parks in the historic county (including the Black Country). Wind farms were very topical last year and, while schemes are still coming forward, none is currently impacting on designed landscapes locally. The big issues coming forward in the future will be the impact of HS2 on several parks, including Ingestre and Swynnerton.

Our Archivist reports that the overall total of sites recorded on our inventory has increased slightly, with eleven sites being added following publication of Volume XI of the Victorian County History, covering Audley, Keele and Trentham parishes and four sites attributed to Edward Milner following publication of "Paxton's Protégé – The Milner White Landscape Gardening

Dynasty” by John Craddock, son of Peter Craddock, a longstanding member of the Trust.

Work in the County Record Office has noted two recently-deposited eighteenth-century plans of Chillington Hall and various documents and design plans by Edward Kemp and William Barron of Rowley Hall, in Stafford. The Catalogue of Special Collections at Reading University has revealed letters of Edward Cooke and James Bateman relating to Biddulph Grange, while the local history website at Burton has produced information about Byrkley Park, Rangemore Hall, Rolleston. Hall, Sinai Park and Stapenhill Hall.

Newspapers are always a good source of contemporary information. The ‘Staffordshire Advertiser’ has been a useful source for garden details via sales advertisements, as has the ‘Derby Mercury’. Interestingly, the old newspapers show that the difficulty with County boundaries did not begin in 1974; the Derbyshire/Staffordshire line was along the River Trent but was altered in 1896, while, in Tamworth, the boundary with Warwickshire ran up the High Street, and the Shropshire border around Market Drayton was decidedly erratic!

On the Activities side, we followed up last year’s AGM at Whitmore Hall with a delightful and informative afternoon at The Temple of Diana at Weston Park, an afternoon at

Burslem Park; a late Victorian park used as a setting in a novel by Arnold Bennett, a tour of Blithfield Hall and an energetic hike around Trentham Park to see the replanting of the north park. John Weston, one of our members, who, with his wife, Sue, is Joint County Organiser for the National Gardens Scheme, gave us a memorable insight into the history and development of the ‘Yellow Book’ scheme to round off our year.

But perhaps for many the event of the year which will stand out above all the others was the trip to London, when we visited The Museum of Garden History before being entertained to tea at The House of Lords by our President, Lord Cormack.

The Chairman of the Activities Group puts on record his gratitude to his colleagues on Council and the wider membership for their help with developing and managing the programme of events.

As the list of parks and gardens grows, the hunt for gardens not yet visited becomes more challenging, though, given that gardens are always changing, some visited in the earlier years of the Trust are ripe for revisiting. Moreover, members have shown themselves willing to travel beyond the County to gardens of exceptional historic interest such as the Elizabethan garden at Kenilworth Castle. Suggestions from members for future visits would be very welcome.

Finally, 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. Firstly, our President, Lord Cormack, who continues to support us from his new home in Lincoln and despite a heavy workload at The House of Lords.

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; and to our Treasurer for her work in managing our finances and ensuring that we remain solvent and prudent in our expenditure.

My special thanks are also 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.

Finally, as every year. I cannot let the moment pass without offering a very special thanks to Bryan Sullivan, who organises our Council meetings, takes our minutes, produces the newsletter and organises our varied and always interesting programme of events.

By Alan Taylor

Signall walled Garden on Tv

The Signall Walled Garden has been filmed for BCC2 on Sunday 15th September, during a Plant Hunters’ Fair.

Outline Productions, the company behind such series as “Great British Food Revival” and the forthcoming “Big British Wildlife Revival”, is working on a new prime-time ten-part series called “Great British Garden Revival.

Dr. and Mrs. Jacques have masterminded the renovation of the 1730s walled garden, employing modern environmentally-conscious methods within the historic framework of walls, paths and fruit trees. The garden opens for the National Gardens Scheme and on Sundays between April and September for the general public.

Over the coming winter they will be launching a Garden School based at the walled garden and the hall. A series of day-courses, including refreshments and lunch, will be run on the themes of garden skills,

garden design, and garden history.

Karen Jacques will take the skills and design aspects, and David Jacques will take the history side. Currently, the courses are being planned, and progress can be tracked on the website, www.signall.co.uk, where details will be published early in the autumn.

“There is nothing in London to compare with Wightwick”

Following the conclusion of the formal business of the evening, members were taken on a guided tour of the house by Tracy Clements, the Estate Manager.

Wightwick Manor, a mock-Tudor mansion with timber-framed, whitewashed walls and tiled roofs, was built for Theodore Mander, a local manufacturer of paint and varnish, by the Liverpool-born architect Edward Ould, who based his designs on the timber-framed cottages of Cheshire and Lancashire, a style which became so popular that it was dubbed “the Ould English style”!

The house was completed in 1887. In 1893, the Great Parlour, was added as a re-creation of a late medieval hall. This hall, which had all the features associated with a medieval hall, such as an open timber roof, a minstrels’ gallery, a screen passage entrance and an enormous inglenook fire, more than doubled the size of the house. It stands at the very centre of the house, both architecturally and socially, its sprung floor being an essential feature in a house where dancing was an important social activity.

The design of the house did not conform to a single medieval period, however; instead, it combined features from a number

of different periods – medieval, Tudor, Elizabethan and Jacobean -, thus giving the impression that the house had grown over the years. The impression of antiquity was also reinforced by the amount of Jacobean panelling and furniture from different periods.

No wonder Tracy (tongue in cheek, no doubt!) introduced the house as first and foremost ‘a fake’. However, she was also quick to point out that, though its inspiration had been from a past age, the comfort of its Victorian occupants had not been neglected, electric lighting having been installed! The Turkish Bath was another modern feature.

Theodore Mander was a devout Congregationalist who, like other Victorian industrialists, combined a strenuous commercial career with a lively social conscience, expressed in a range of civic and philanthropic activities.

He was a benevolent employer, re-building estate cottages for his estate workers and providing his servants with comfortable

accommodation. While retaining the social barriers of his age; he might provide his servants with comfortable accommodation, but it was still at the very top of the house, and the dining-room was situated at one end of the

house while the kitchen was at the other, so servants still had to carry heavy dishes of cooked food a considerable distance. But Mrs. Beeton did recommend boiling cabbage for forty minutes with the lid off...!

Theodore Mander shared the aesthetic and social values of the Arts and Crafts Movement, whose philosophy was heavily influenced by the writings of John Ruskin, the leading art critic of the time, who deplored the development of industrialisation and the impact which it was having on both



The Rose Garden



Wightwick Manor

A Walk Around Hagley Park



The approach to the rose garden

traditional skills and the working and living conditions of ordinary people.

Theodore commissioned wallpapers and fabrics from the firm of William Morris, glass from Charles Kempe and tiles from William de Morgan, all of whom were at the forefront of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Together with paintings by members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who also took their inspiration from a past age, rejecting developments in their art over the past two centuries.

Theodore's son, Sir Geoffrey, and his second wife Rosalie, an expert on the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, continued to add to an already impressive collection of paintings and other works of art until, in Simon Jenkins' words, Wightwick Manor became "an Arts and Crafts Banquet" Today the visitor can see, in addition to wallpapers and fabrics by William Morris, tiles by William De Morgan, glass by Charles Kempe and eighteenth-century Chinese porcelain and Turkish carpets, paintings by, amongst others, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman-Hunt, John Everett Millais, Edward Burne-Jones, Ford Madox Brown, John Ruskin and Frederic, Lord Leighton.

Also on display in a large collection

of late nineteenth and early twentieth century books is a Kelmscott Chaucer, illustrated by Burne-Jones and printed by William Morris at his home, Kelmscott Manor, in Oxfordshire.

In 1899 Theodore Mander invited Alfred Parsons to submit designs for the garden. In his time, Parsons was as well-known as a painter of landscapes, gardens and flowers as a garden designer. Indeed, he believed that the eye of a painter was essential to good garden design.

He described the garden he found at Wightwick as "rambling and disjointed", but little, if anything, remains of the garden he designed, and none of his plans survive. Following Theodore Mander's death in 1900, his widow, Flora, already closely involved with her husband in its development, invited Thomas Mawson to prepare plans for the layout of the garden.

He designed the South Terrace, the Lower South Garden and the Long Walk, as well as the areas around the pools and streams, though it is not known whether he incorporated any part of Parsons's layout in his designs.

Mawson believed that the garden should complement the house. He divided the grounds into distinct compartments from which the house could be glimpsed, though Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre, in their book on Staffordshire's historic gardens, judge that, each compartment having its own separate identity, the garden as a consequence lacks coherence.

Mawson also believed that the formality of lawns and topiary close to the house should give way to the less formal the further one moved away from it. Eventually, the grounds melted into the neighbouring landscape, a philosophy well illustrated at Wightwick Manor, where the terraces, walls, balustrades and clipped yews in front of the house give way to orchards, winding paths, pools and stream, finally merging into the countryside.

However, the high cost of maintenance led to the loss of some features of Mawson's design as the need to economise became more pressing, though some have since been restored by The National Trust.



The Rotunda

In the eighteenth century, Hagley Hall was, with Enville, (the seat of the Earl of Stamford, and The Leasowes, the home of the poet William Shenstone) one of the three estates in the West Midlands which had to be visited.

All were within ten miles of each other, and each was developed by its owner, consequently being spared the attention of professional landscape designers like 'Capability' Brown and Humphry Repton.

All marked the movement away from the rigid formality of the continental model preferred by André Le Nôtre and his imitators which had dominated garden design for the past century. Instead, all were being developed from the 1740s onwards in the new 'picturesque' style encouraged by a new attitude to Nature evident in the art and literature of the age which rejected the domination of Nature by Man in favour of a recognition and enjoyment of its variety of form and moods.

The park, like so many eighteenth-century landscaped parks, had originally been a medieval deer park. Designed as a circuit walk and taking full advantage of its natural

"...the great Beauty of Hagley is the great Diversity of the ground" (John Parnell, 1770)

topography of hills and valleys, ancient woodland and watercourses, it was laid out by George Lyttleton (1709-1773), later 1st Baron Lyttleton, following the death in childbirth of his beloved first wife Lucy, though the work had already been started by his father, Thomas. Prominent in public life through family connections, his wide circle of friends included politicians like William Pitt the Elder and literary giants like the poets Alexander Pope and William Shenstone (all of whom advised him in the laying out of the park) and James Thomson, the Scottish nature poet.

Thomson went so far as to incorporate a section on Hagley in a revised version of his poem, "The Seasons", in which he wrote of "hollow whispering breezes", "mossy rocks", "gushing waters" and "rough cascade", declaring that Hagley was "The British Tempe!".

The park still offers its visitors the rich variety of buildings and ornaments erected to stimulate thought and contemplation in the minds of its visitors. Prominent amongst these is Sanderson Miller's Ruined Castle, built in part from stone taken from the ruins of Halesowen Abbey, and intended as a declaration of loyalty to the Whig party (to whom Gothic architecture represented Liberty), A reminder of the inexorable passage of time or even as a spurious claim to an ancient lineage.

In addition, there are an Ionic Rotunda, unusual for having a stone roof; a column in memory of Prince Frederick, to whom George Lyttleton was for a time Secretary, though with whom he later quarrelled; a hermitage; a grotto; a Palladian

Bridge; a cascade (all undergoing or awaiting restoration); Memorials to Pope (the urn has gone but the base remains), Thomson, Shenstone and Milton, testimony to his reputation as a poet and a cultured man of letters who had studied classical literature and been on The Grand Tour.

Beyond the inner park, there stands the Temple of Theseus, designed by James 'Athenian' Stewart, which, predating the Doric Temple at Shugborough by just two years, is the earliest Greek revivalist building in the country. Like the nearby obelisk, it has been recently restored but has, sadly, been even more recently disfigured by graffiti.

Early visitors to Hagley included John Adams, who was to become the second President of the United States of America, and his Vice-President and successor, Thomas Jefferson, as well as members of the European royalty and nobility. After his visit, Horace Walpole, inveterate visitor of gardens, wrote: "I wore out my eyes with gazing, my feet with climbing, and my tongue and vocabulary with commending".

What visitors experienced as they made their way around George Lyttleton's landscape was not only a cultural experience recalling past civilisations but also a variety of sensual experiences. Visitors passing from the gloom of the oak-enfolded church, through a vale devoid of plants and scattered with fallen rocks depicting "a great percussion of Nature" to a "roseate bower of paradise" of honeysuckle and lily pond and finally to the openness of expansive pasture and magnificent views of the Malvern Hills, the Clee Hills and, beyond, the

Black Mountains obtained from the highest point of the park.

According to Thomson, it could also provide the appropriate atmosphere in which to “plan Britannia’s weal” in “warm benevolence of mind” and “honest zeal unwarp’d by Party-Rage”. “Perhaps”, he comforted the still-grieving Lyttelton, “the lov’d Lucinda shares thy walk with soul attun’d”.

But by 1830 a visitor was recording that “the park is no longer what it was” and a further century-and-a-half of decline left it a ghost of its former greatness. In 2006, Christopher, 12th Viscount Cobham, inherited the title and estate on the death of his older brother and, having read the book by Michael Cousins, came to the conclusion that Hagley Park must be worth saving.

In 2011 Askew Nelson Limited, a firm of landscape architects, were commissioned to carry out a detailed survey of the historic landscape and prepare a Conservation Management Plan as part of a Higher Level Stewardship agreement between Viscount Cobham and Natural England.

The following year, Joe Hawkins, formerly Head Gardener at Shugborough, became Head of Landscape at Hagley Hall, and, already well versed in the history of eighteenth-century landscape design, he applied knowledge gained from his recently-completed MA in Garden History (Bristol) to bring a deeper understanding of Hagley Park. Initially, this was via a total immersion in the natural and historic features of the park equipped only with the period descriptions. Following these assiduously, such a phenomenological approach has paid dividends, revealing a more accurate picture of the original landscape, including discoveries that have lain buried for well over a hundred years. These discoveries have ensured greater period accuracy and authenticity when drawing up the recent management plan.

Having visited The Leasowes in 2008 and Enville in 2009, members finally visited Hagley Park in June of this year, when Joe took us around an arbitrarily chosen circuit, albeit one which many original visitors to the

estate would have followed and which is now being uncovered and restored so that present and future visitors can enjoy a similar experience.

In the course of the afternoon, he outlined the programme of restoration already begun and due for completion in the Spring of 2014, after which it will be open to the general public, who will then have the opportunity to immerse themselves in an experience which was once familiar to their eighteenth-century predecessors.

Footnote 1. Next January, Joe will be travelling to Pasadena, in California, where he will spend the month studying the collection of Lyttelton letters stored at the Huntingdon Library, which is where the entire Stowe archive has been deposited.

Footnote 2: Built by the GWR in 1929, Locomotive 4930 “Hagley Hall” was one of a series named after various halls. Withdrawn in 1963, it is now undergoing restoration at the Severn Valley Railway depot at Bridgnorth. To fund this work, The Friends of Locomotive 4930 “Hagley Hall” have raised nearly £100,000 through their Sales Stand, by running photographic charter trains and through donations by a dedicated group of supporters, who would welcome further donations.

(The Editor thanks one of the Trust’s members, Michael Faarup, for this information)



A Cascade Revealed

The Website

Did you know that our website gets visitors from all over the world? Visits are regularly recorded from countries such as the USA, Canada, the Czech Republic, China, Sweden and South Africa!

We receive increasing correspondence concerning conservation issues and requests for archive material – all helping to ‘spread the word’ (and hopefully increase our membership).

The website is still relatively young; it was launched in January 2011, and our average number of ‘unique’ visitors (or ‘traffic’) has steadily climbed since to 267 per month last year. The months of June and July this year, however, have seen quite a significant rise in this traffic; at the time of going to press we are on target to reach a record of nearly 400 visitors for July!

Equally significantly, statistics show that more and more people are using the information stored on the site. It is clearly starting to meet the Trust’s aspirations of becoming a valuable online resource to students, researchers, fellow Trusts and enthusiasts.

Recently, the Web Team were asked by the Council of Management to contact those members who had submitted email addresses to take part in a web-based survey on the Trust’s activities and publications. The survey ran for two weeks in May, and we’d like to thank everyone who took part.

The results of the survey showed that: most respondents would prefer to receive notifications by post; the content and type of activities are considered good; in fact, all the feedback on the Trust’s activities were very positive; Events within Staffordshire and neighbouring counties are preferred, as most respondents preferred to make

their own way, but ‘organised transport – included’ trips may be well worth considering for the future, over half expressing an interest; The content of the Newsletter is considered very good, with most voters (77%) preferring to carry on receiving them by post; Feedback on the Website was positive, with ‘Activities’ being the most read pages, with the Homepage and Archive sections running a close second at 20%.

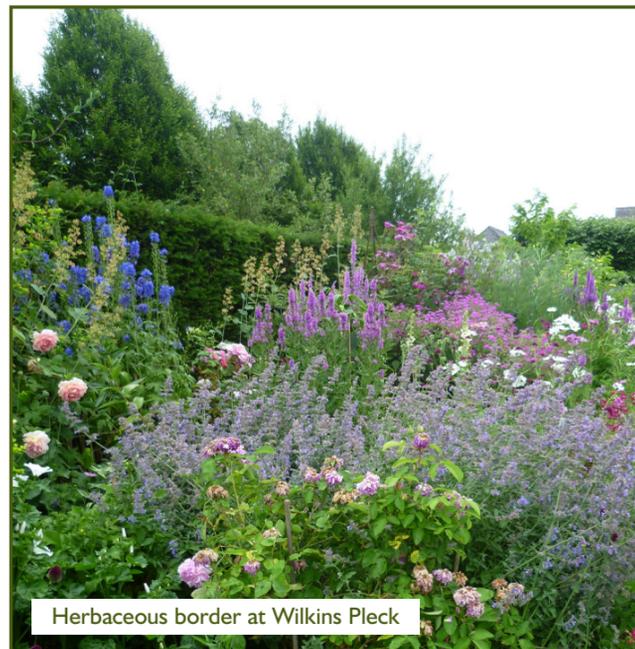
If you would like to be included in future surveys, please do let us have your email address to add to our Membership records.

If you haven’t visited the website, please do: you can find us on <http://www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org/>. The site, which is regularly updated, not only provides details of past, current and future events, but has lots of useful links. You will also find back-copies of Newsletters and a list of the Trust’s gardens and parks in the archive.

If you have any suggestions for possible visits or articles for the Newsletter, do drop us a line; contact details are on your website.

Or why not email us?

The Web Team.



Herbaceous border at Wilkins Pleck

“Six Acres of Paradise in North Staffordshire”

In July, members visited Wilkins Pleck, a six-acre garden in North Staffordshire developed in the Arts and Crafts tradition by Chris and Sheila Bissell, who began work on the garden in 1995.

The task which faced them was daunting; they were confronted by a muddy field, “more like a paddy field than a garden”. The site was already occupied by a cottage which dated back to 1877, but there was, said Sheila, not a garden in sight! Not surprisingly for somewhere so close to the Potteries, the soil is almost entirely solid clay, and the area experiences an unusually high rainfall, so Chris, by profession an engineer specialising in waste water treatment, set about laying drainage and improving the soil by importing hundreds of tonnes of compost, horticultural grit and top soil, while Sheila planned the layout and the planting, taking her ideas from other gardens she had visited, particularly the National Trust garden at Hidcote, just outside Chipping Campden, as well as from magazines and books.

The result is described in Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre’s book on the historic gardens of Staffordshire as being “one of the county’s most inspiring gardens”, whose wide herbaceous borders “which move from

cool colours to hot, are worthy of comparison with Hidcote”.

A series of enclosed gardens have been created around the house, contained within brick walls and yew hedges, which protect the plants from the strong westerly winds to which the site is exposed. Other features include a formal parterre, a rectangular pool fronted by a timber loggia, a knot garden

and an arbour leading to an avenue of pleached limes.

The garden also testifies to Chris and Sheila’s love of trees, though they are limited in what they can plant; nonetheless, amongst those to be seen are dawn redwoods, Japanese maples and Portuguese laurels.

Chris’s overseas travels have inspired him to design a ruined temple based on the one at Leptis Magna, in Libya, and the bridges over the koi-filled pond are based on the Japanese bridge in Monet’s garden.

The garden, which opens under The National Gardens Scheme, has featured in BBC2’s “Open Gardens” programme and, in 2011, was named in “Gardens Illustrated” as one of the top ten gardens to visit.

Members left sated by the horticultural riches they had savoured in the course of their visit. Almost incredibly, Chris and Sheila employ just one part-time gardener, whose task it is to trim the hedges and edges of the lawns, while Sheila, assisted by her sister, attends to the annual planting, using cuttings from a well-stocked greenhouse, and Chris maintains the structures.

What was clear from the visit was that, in Staffordshire, creative energy does not find expression only in its pots, and, in Wilkins Pleck, the county has a garden which, it is hoped, will give pleasure for many years to come.

Acknowledgements

The Editor wishes to acknowledge with grateful thanks the assistance of Joe Hawkins, Jackie Moseley, Giff Broadbent, Alan Taylor and John Weston in compiling this issue of the Newsletter and Colin Fletcher, of LGD Solutions, who prepared the layout.



Wilkins Pleck Parterre

REFLECTION ON A VISIT TO WILKINS PLECK

Parks and gardens by their very nature are never static even between seasons and at most historic sites successive generations have either changed or added to the layout. This pattern of change and the overlays of history are part of the fascination of our field of study. It is right and proper that modern generations should make their mark either at historic sites or through the creation of new designed landscapes. Although the primary objective of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust is to promote the conservation and understanding of the county's rich and varied legacy of historic parks, we have always encompassed an interest in contemporary garden design which has been reflected in some of the sites we have visited.

Wilkins Pleck falls very much into the new creation category and when we visited in July it was remarkable to see how a flat and uninteresting piece of pasture land has been

imaginatively transformed into an attractive and varied sequence of garden compartments over the last 20 years. This transformation is perhaps all the more striking given the extent and variety in the garden, the fact that the work is entirely that of the owner and her immediate family with only limited external assistance.

The garden is essentially a plantsman's with the hedged compartments laid out to create formal but self contained vistas within which massed ranks of carefully selected plants and flowers are displayed for their colour and effect. The basic design elements take their cue from Edwardian formal layouts – stone pathways flanked by grassed edges and massed herbaceous borders or pleached lime walks – although the recent drift garden of wild flower planting in expansive lawns makes a nod towards more contemporary taste while enjoyably complementing the more traditional neighbouring layouts.

The garden is yet young but well established and still developing. The successful reprise of historical design themes shows their enduring relevance and facility to create a garden which is modern and not

copyist. The skill in producing that design and implementing both the framework planting and floral displays in so short a time span is quite awe inspiring but perhaps the single most striking memory (apart from the hospitality we enjoyed on the visit) is the sheer energy of the owner, her husband, sister and one part time gardener in keeping the garden in such immaculate health and order.

Alan Taylor

'A proper little town'

To mark 1110 years since Stafford was established as a Saxon burgh, Staffordshire Archives & Heritage, in conjunction with the William Salt Library, is holding a three-week exhibition of their unique Stafford Borough collections.

It will run from Friday 13th September to Friday 4th October 2013, at the Staffordshire Record Office in Eastgate Street, Stafford.

Opening hours will be as follows:
Mondays-Fridays 10am-4pm;
Saturdays 10am-12.30pm.
Admission is free,

Memorial Gardens

Next year will mark the outbreak of World War One, and the human sacrifice of the next four years has been commemorated in a number of ways, most notably in the shape of war memorials but also of community halls and gardens.

As a contribution to next year's commemoration, the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust is compiling a list of memorial gardens in Staffordshire opened in the years following the Armistice and is appealing to its members to let it know of any such garden in the area where they live.

Any supplementary information and photographs would also be appreciated.

It is hoped that this may be the start of a project which will provide a comprehensive record for future searchers, viewable on the Trust's website.

Please send your contribution to the SGPT Chairman, at 15 Village Gardens, Walton-on-the-Hill, Stafford ST17 0LL or, if you prefer, by email to alangtaylor@btinternet.com.

Still To Come

The Trust will be making the following visits in September and October:

Saturday, September 7th, Melbourne Hall

The gardens at Melbourne Hall are a rare example of early eighteenth-century garden design untouched by later landscape designers. The guided tour, led by the Administrator, Jill Weston, will start promptly at 2.00 p.m. and will last an hour, after which members will be free to roam the gardens at will.

Saturday, October 12th, Ingestre Hall

The visit will be led by Gill Broadbent, Director and Trustee of the Friends of Ingestre Orangery, and will start promptly at 1.00 p.m. at the nearby Church of St. Mary the Virgin, the only Wren church outside London. It will continue with a tour of the North, Mount and South Gardens and end at the eighteenth-century Orangery, where tea and cakes will be served.

Anyone wishing to take part in either of these visits should contact Bryan Sullivan on 01543 684965.

THE FRIENDS OF INGESTRE ORANGERY

("Orangery: A spacious building designed to protect orange plants and forerunner of the glasshouse and conservatory")

The Friends of Ingestre Orangery was formed as a company in January 2012 and as a registered charity in July 2010 with the purpose of restoring the Orangery "so that its heritage can be shared and used by the community".

The Orangery, which was built in about 1770 by James and Samuel Wyatt to a design by James Stuart, had been unused for many years, and its window frames were in danger of rotting and the glass of falling out, while the interior was overgrown by a fig tree and clematis. Initially, essential restoration was funded by individual donations and a grant from the Staffordshire Community Fund. The stated aim of the Friends is "To preserve for the nation Ingestre Orangery and to carry on these activities which sustain the preservation of the Building and support and enhance the education, health and well-being of the community".

Volunteers have already spent six hundred hours improving the condition of Orangery and restoring The Long Walk which leads to it.

The Orangery has been visited by over five hundred people, including local history groups, members of NADFAS and social clubs, these visits being given an added dimension by combining them with visits to Ingestre Hall and Ingestre Church. Fund-raising events have included performances by the Andante Choir, an historical exhibition and presentation by the Ingestre and Tixall History Society, an art exhibition organised by a local artist, and tours led by volunteer guides.

A website www.foio.btck.co.uk has been set up so that a wider public can follow the progress being made towards restoring the Orangery to its former glory.

An Optional Appraisal to look at the feasibility and sustainability of the project was carried out in 2012. This took into account its future use by the community as an heritage and art centre and meeting place which would also be environmentally sustainable, in terms of a renewable heating source and efficient insulation. A draft report was circulated amongst villagers and posted on the website, and a formal consultation evening held. A revised report taking into account all the responses received was then drafted, and this was approved by The Architectural Heritage Fund in January of this year. A summary of the report can be viewed on the Friends' website. Work would include the construction of a permanent building at the back of the

Orangery to provide a small kitchen, toilets and storage space. It has been estimated that the total cost of the project will be in the region of £500,000, the greater part of which would be met by grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Architectural Heritage Fund and the English Heritage Capacity Building Grants.

Thereafter, operational costs would need to be funded through revenue.

"Mr. James Stuart of Grosvenor Square, History painter and Architect"

On June 22nd, the Friends celebrated the opening of the Long Walk by staging an exhibition about James Stuart in the Orangery together with a talk by Dr. Kerry Bristol, a senior lecturer at the School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies at the University of Leeds.

Dr. Bristol began by pointing out that, unlike contemporaries such as Robert Adam, no archive exists for James Stuart and, consequently, the researcher must turn to those of his patrons to learn about the development of his career. The actual date of his birth is uncertain, but it is believed that he was born around 1713 (which makes 2013 his tercentenary, a year ahead of "Capability" Brown's). Since he was a Roman Catholic, no record of his baptism survives, the ceremony having taken place privately rather than in a church.

He was born to poor parents; his father, who died when he was young, was a Scottish sailor, and it is believed that his mother may have been Welsh. From an early age he showed the talent for drawing that was to distinguish him throughout his life, and was apprenticed to a fan painter, this being a growth industry at the time (William Kent began his career by painting the panels of coaches).

In 1735 he joined a drawing school in London and then there is a gap of seven years, until, in 1742, he turns up in Florence, an acknowledged centre of antiquity, having walked to Italy (at that time, travel was more expensive than accommodation, so walking was for many a preferred way of travelling). Here, he developed a deep knowledge in the arts, going on to develop a reputation as a connoisseur of arts and establish himself as a consultant, fluent in both Italian and Latin.

One of his tasks was to obtain works of art for clients on The Grand Tour to take back home. In the face of such determined acquisitiveness, well served by other agents, the Roman authorities were powerless to enforce the law, which could easily be circumvented by bribery.

He went on to visit Pompeii, which had just been discovered, and then spent five months in Venice studying the work of the sixteenth-century Italian architect, Andrea Palladio, whose signature style, which aimed at achieving balance, proportion and a sense of harmony through the use of geometrical form, notably the cube, was very much in vogue and widely copied. .

Here, he met Sir James Bray, which proved to a most fortuitous encounter, since Sir James's brother was Secretary of The Dilettante Society, a society of noblemen and scholars which sponsored the study of Greek and Roman art and commissioned new work in the classical style. As a consequence, Stuart was nominated to become a member, which immediately opened up to him a pool of patrons and ensured that he would never be short of commissions.

Sponsored by The Dilettante Society, he next travelled to Athens accompanied by Nicholas Revett, a young East Anglian nobleman and amateur architect, Gavin Hamilton, a Scottish neo-classical painter, and Matthew Brettingham the Younger, a minor architect from Norwich.

At this time, Greece was governed by the Turks, who viewed all Western European Christians with suspicion, to the extent that, when Stuart and Revett were measuring the Parthenon, at that time a Turkish garrison, they were mistaken for spies and had rocks dropped on them!



Ingestre Orangery

Stuart and Revett spent two-and-a-half years in Athens, examining its classical buildings, the latter measuring them while the former drew them, and their labours were to result in the publication, in 1762, of the first volume of "The Antiquities of Athens and Other Monuments of Greece".

By far the most influential of James Stuart's patron was Thomas Anson, of Shugborough Hall, who personally employed him in several projects there, notably in designing the Doric Temple, The Choragic Monument and the Tower of the Winds, all Stuart's adaptations of classical buildings he had seen and sketched in Athens. Anson also introduced him to a number of family connections; through Thomas's brother Admiral George Anson, he was appointed Surveyor to the Royal Naval Hospital at Greenwich, and the Chapel he designed there is considered by many his finest achievement.

No commission was too insignificant; the silver tureen he designed for the Hospital is still in use to this day.

George Anson's wife, Elizabeth, belonged to the Yorke family of Wimpole Hall, in Cambridgeshire, where Stuart was to secure more commissions. He also worked for the Ansons' near neighbours, the Bagots of Blithfield Hall, where he designed a classical front to the west wing which was never built and where the Orangery was built to his design by James and Samuel Wyatt. He was also introduced to the Chetwynds of Ingestre Hall and to Josiah Wedgwood, whose ceramic bowl originally crowned the Choragic Monument at Shugborough.

As an architect, though, his contribution was restricted to providing the design; he took no part in the actual construction. By 1765, James Stuart was at the peak of his career and in that one year was engaged in designing no fewer than five town houses; he was quite simply

the man to go to if you wanted to know anything about the architecture of Ancient Greece. Not all his clients were satisfied, however; Mrs Elizabeth Montague, for whom he was designing a house in Portman Square, complained about the slow rate at which the work was proceeding, describing him in her letters as "a bit of a drunk, a

bit lazy", though, in fairness to Stuart, it should be said that Mrs. Montague was rare amongst clients of her time in refusing to go into debt to complete the project and in insisting that the work should always remain within her income.

Be that as it may, the last ten years of his life saw a considerable reduction in his work, partly due to ill-health (he suffered from gout) and partly due to a second marriage



Inside the Orangery

when he was 67 which resulted in four young children, on whom he doted. In any case, h w a wealthy man, and fulfilling his potential never seemed to have been the primary aim of his life.

He was also painstaking in preparing the illustrative plates which accompanied his publications, often correcting them when they were returned by the printer.

At the time of his sudden death in 1788, it was left to his young widow to preserve his legacy, but, instead, she allowed his papers to rot in the stables of her new home, to the great loss of future generations of architectural historians.

So what has been his legacy, then? First and foremost, he is seen as having inspired the movement known as the Greek Revival in European architecture, though Dr. Bristol believes that to focus on this is to overlook his wider interest in Hellenistic culture, Ancient Roman architecture and the Renaissance.

But an obvious part of his legacy to have survived into this century has been his garden buildings, which will, given the enthusiasm of such people as The Friends of Ingestre Orangery, continue to survive for future generations to admire and enjoy.

Join us for the visit on Saturday 12th October 2013

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