

Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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News LETTER

“GOD’S ACRE”

“A garden cemetery and ornamental decoration are not only beneficial to public morals, but are likewise calculated to extend virtuous and generous feelings.”

- John Strang, “Necropolis Glasguensis”, 1831

The public cemetery has been a prominent feature of the urban landscape since the mid-nineteenth century and is at the heart of the history of landscape design.

For centuries, burials had nearly always taken place in the local churchyard, supervised by the parish priest, the exceptions being a number of cemeteries devoted to the burial of non-Protestant denominations, but as the result of explosive urban expansion these became so overcrowded that they began to present a serious health hazard. Such was the concentration of burials in some churchyards, in fact, that the level of the churchyard was higher than that of the interior of the churches they surrounded!

At first, demand was met by private enterprise; joint-stock companies were set up, charging fees and paying dividends to investors. In the 1830s cemeteries were established by private companies in Birmingham, Newcastle, Sheffield and Leeds as well as in London, where seven large cemeteries were established between 1833 and 1841, outside the city boundaries. Here, land was cheaper, but transporting coffin and mourners to the suburbs added to the cost (For Brookwood Cemetery, in Woking, Surrey, a dedicated railway line was built which ran from Waterloo Station and terminated at one of two platforms at the cemetery, the one to receive Anglican corteges, the other those of Dissenters).

Another of these cemeteries, Abney Park, in Stoke Newington, was the first wholly non-denominational garden cemetery in Europe. Laid out by the celebrated nurseryman and horticulturalist George Loddiges in an historic eighteenth-century park, it also incorporated an arboretum in which every tree was labelled.

However, following the cholera epidemic of 1831-32, which killed 52,000 people throughout the country, it became evident that, such was the scale of the problem, private finance alone could not provide the solution, and in 1848, following the publication of a report by the social reformer Edwin Chadwick entitled “The Sanitary Condition of the Labouring population”, the first Public Health Act was passed by Parliament. There followed a series of Burial Acts which empowered local authorities to provide cemeteries financed from the Poor Rate (this did not always prove the solution, however – according to a report in “The Times” of 1874, the ratepayers of West Looe, in Cornwall, were “determined to put off the evil day of spending money as long as possible, and a motion in favour of taking steps for the formation of a Burial Board was defeated”!).

Amongst measures which Chadwick recommended were state-funded mortuaries to which bodies could be taken before burial rather than being kept in crowded family homes (It was not unknown for an undertaker to refuse to remove a corpse for burial for weeks until his fee had been paid up front).

Not unexpectedly, the Church of England saw all this as an attack on their status (and monopoly) as the established church - and, it must be said, on the income of their clergy, already eroded by the growing number of company-funded cemeteries. In 1855, William Hale, Archdeacon of London, published “A Charge addressed to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of London” in which he sought to refute the growing belief that burial within urban churchyards was injurious to public



Stapenhill's Imposing Entrance

health. He also attacked what he saw as the growing interference of 'the Legislature'; the 1848 Public Health Act had even given the local boards set up by the General Board of Health the power to apply to close existing graveyards!

The first cemetery in England to be funded from public money was, in fact, opened as early as 1835. St. Bartholomew's Cemetery, in Exeter, was commissioned by the Exeter Improvement Commissioners, and, though interdenominational, the section intended for Dissenters was nonetheless separated from the rest of the graveyard by a brick wall and remained unconsecrated, the Bishop of the time, Henry Phillpotts, refusing to carry out the ceremony (Bishop Phillpotts, a High Churchman, was one of the longest-serving yet least popular Bishops of Exeter. He was notorious for being quarrelsome and litigious, and was described by the Prime Minister, Viscount Melbourne, as "that devil of a Bishop who inspired more terror than Satan did", but who nonetheless felt obliged to add that "it must be said that he is a gentleman"!).

In 1843, John Claudius Loudon published the highly-influential "On The Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries: And On The Improvement of Churchyards'", in which, as the title suggests, he set out in the minutest detail rules for the laying out and management of these cemeteries.

Loudon, who was born in Cambuslang, in Lanarkshire, in 1783, was a prolific writer on a wide range of agricultural, architectural and horticultural subjects, as the titles of some of his publications show; "An Encyclopaedia of Gardening" appeared in 1822, followed by "The Green-House Companion" in 1824, the first volume of "The Encyclopaedia of Agriculture" in 1825, "The Encyclopaedia of Plants" in 1828, "The Encyclopaedia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture" in 1834, "The Suburban Gardener" in 1838, and "The Encyclopaedia of Trees and Shrubs" in 1842.

In addition, he was publisher and editor of and contributor to a number of horticultural and architectural magazines; in fact, there seemed no aspect of these activities on which he did not have an opinion which he wished to communicate for the education of the wider public.

He traces his interest in cemeteries to a visit which he had made to the public cemetery in Warsaw in 1813, where he was appalled to see the poor buried coffin-less in trenches in open ground while the coffins of the higher classes were hermetically sealed in cells in the boundary walls. His interest was reanimated when he was commissioned by the Directors of a Cemetery Company at Cambridge to prepare a plan for the laying out and future management of a cemetery for the city (now known as Mill Road Cemetery, it was laid out to Loudon's design between 1842 and 1843, the year of his death). This led him to consider the general principles and arrangements

connected with cemeteries, and "On the Laying Out, Planting and Management of Cemeteries" was the result.

In Loudon's view, churchyards had two uses: the disposal of the dead in such a manner "as their decomposition...shall not prove injurious to the living" as the result of "noxious effluvia" and "mephitic exhalations"; and "the improvement of the moral sentiments and general taste of all classes, and more especially the great masses of society".

It was a long-held belief that atmospheric vapours were the cause of epidemics (which made churchyards particularly dangerous environments), whereas the two deadliest – cholera and typhus – were caused by polluted water supplies (to which urban churchyards also contributed), though this was not recognised until well into the nineteenth century.

To achieve the former, graves should be properly spaced (he recommends eight feet by four for a single interment), of sufficient depth (depending, in the case of family or common graves, on the number of likely internments – "There is no reason why graves should not be as deep as wells"), and filled with soil to a depth of six feet. (However, in 1847 an Act was passed by Parliament that decreed that no coffin should be buried at a depth of less than thirty inches below the surface of the burial ground, that is, not much more than the depth of a modern spade). Once full, the grave should never be re-opened for later use (Here, Loudon is clearly alluding to the practice of disinterring earlier burials, sometimes before the process of decomposition was complete, in order to re-use the space).

To achieve the latter, "we would encourage the erection of handsome monuments, and the inscription on them of moral sentiments, the former to improve the taste, and the latter to cultivate the heart and affections".

From these details, it takes little imagination to picture the state of the churchyards which existed at the time, even without Dickens's lurid description of Nemo's grave in "a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination and a Caffre would shudder at" ("They put him wery nigh the top. They was obliged to stamp on it to git it in"). However, it should be pointed out that publication of "Bleak House" began in 1852, nine years after the publication of Loudon's book, when the movement to provide communities with hygienic burial was already gathering strength.

In Loudon's view, a churchyard or cemetery, "properly designed, laid out, ornamented with tombs, planted with trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, all named and properly kept, might become a school of instruction in architecture, sculpture, landscape gardening, neatness and high keeping", and, once full, after an interval of a few years, be opened as public walks or gardens.



Registrar's Lodge



2nd Class Graves

He attacked what he saw as medieval superstition which peopled churchyards with ghouls and inculcated "gloomy horrors" and "debasement fears", arguing that they should instead encourage sombre reflection.

To achieve this effect, trees should be evergreen, conical in shape and of dark foliage "because the variety produced by deciduous and flowering trees is not favourable to the expression of solemnity or grandeur". Trees should not be planted in belts or clumps, while too many trees and shrubs would impede the free circulation of the air and the drying effect of the sun, as well as taking up ground that would be better used for graves (Loudon advocated a carefully-tabulated grid system as being the most economical use of space).

Similarly, "we would never plant flowers or flowering shrubs...in beds or patches that might be mistaken for a lawn or a flower garden, but...plant them only in situations and on spots where at some future time a grave would be dug".

That Loudon brought to his task a lifetime's experience of garden and landscape design, including public parks, is evident by some of his proposals; for example, "it ought to be a general rule to place handsome monuments at particular points of view; such as at angles by the junction or intersection of roads or walls, terminations to straight walks, points seen from the entrances and from the chapel, & C, where, in other words, they would act as eyecatchers.

His eye for both proportion and perspective is evident in the advice he gives on the siting of the chapels within the cemetery: "the chapel or chapels ought to be placed in a central and conspicuous situation...grouped together in one conspicuous situation, (as at Hartshill)... or placed so far apart, or in situations so different, that they either both cannot be seen from the same point, or that, if seen in the

same view, the one shall appear to the eye so much smaller than the other as to appear as part of the background of the picture (as at Stapenhill).”

Of lodges, he writes, “One lodge would generally be found preferable to two, because, where lodges are of such a size as to be useful, and are widely separated by spacious gates, they attract attention as separate objects, and do not group together so as to satisfy the eye as a whole”.

While Loudon himself designed only three cemeteries – at Bath, Cambridge and Southampton –, his writing on the subject - and his advocacy of a more natural, ‘picturesque’ style - had a major influence on other designers and architects of the time.

Loudon had been clearly influenced by an earlier publication by a fellow Scotsman, John Strang, who had published “Necropolis Glasguensis: with Observations on Ancient and Modern Tombs and Sepulture”, in 1831, and in which he had lamented “the melancholy state of our Scottish sepulchres” and called for “the establishment in this neighbourhood of a Necropolis, from its locality at once respectful to the dead and sanatory (sic) to the living, while it would be, at the same time, peculiarly dedicated to the Genius of Memory, and calculated for the extension of religious and moral feeling”.

Like Loudon, Strang held up La Cimetière de Pere Lachaise, in Paris, which, laid out in the Picturesque style, had opened in 1804, as the beau ideal (“Within the extensive and variegated enclosure... situated on Mont Louis, it is perhaps unnecessary to state, that all the disagreeable sensations which are here coupled with a churchyard are dispelled by the beauty of the garden, the variety of its walks, by the romantic nature of its situation, and, above all, by the commanding view of Paris and its environs which it affords”), which Strang thought could be replicated in Glasgow by Fir Park, a park and arboretum, with its broken and varied surface, its picturesque and romantic form, its winding walks, and its splendid views of the city.

Strang’s recommendations run along similar lines to those of Loudon, though Loudon’s are in much greater detail, covering every aspect of design from general layout of paths to drainage to secure foundations for monuments.

The work of designing these new cemeteries attracted the most prominent landscape architects of the time; Joseph Paxton designed the London Road Cemetery in Coventry in 1847, and Edward Milner, at one time Paxton’s assistant, had already designed a number of public parks when he was commissioned to design Stapenhill Cemetery, on the outskirts of Burton-on-Trent, which opened in 1866.

“A typical Victorian cemetery”

Hartshill Cemetery, in Stoke-on-Trent, which the Trust visited in June of this year, for a guided tour led by the Trust Chairman, Alan Taylor, is in its layout and planting a typical Victorian cemetery which, in its social and religious distinctions, reflects the values of Victorian society.

It was opened on a windy day in November 1884 by the Bishop of Lichfield “in the presence of a large concourse of people” which included the city’s Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors, several local clergy and a surpliced choir. The Bishop was there to consecrate only the Church of England section of the cemetery; twenty years earlier, an attempt had been made to prevent the Mayor and Corporation from attending a similar Act of Consecration at another cemetery in Stoke on the grounds that the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, which had discriminated against Roman Catholics and Non-conformists, had placed all denominations on an equal footing, but this had not prevented their attendance.

The grounds had been laid out by Messrs. Milner and Son, a firm of London landscape designers, on a gently sloping site and divided into sections along religious and social lines; within separate areas allotted to Anglican, Non-Conformist and Roman Catholic denominations there were four classes of graves, reflecting the social distinctions of the age. Presumably, the purpose of this segregation was not so much to perpetuate the social distinctions which had identified the dead while they were living as to preserve those distinctions amongst the bereaved when visiting the graves of their loved ones (Loudon’s vision was far more egalitarian: “In making arrangements for the situation of graves,” he wrote, “regard must be had to the wealth and taste of the persons who will probably use the cemetery... At the same time, we should mark no part of the ground as exclusively devoted to any class of society”)

First-class graves were located at the upper end of the cemetery and were distinguished by the more imposing monuments. Prominent amongst these is the grave of Colin Minton Campbell, a member of the celebrated family of potters, who, as Mayor, gave his support (and £500 of his own money) to the laying out of the cemetery, although that of his wife, who, since his death, had converted to Catholicism, is to be found not next to her husband’s but in the section set aside for Roman Catholics.

At the other end of the social scale, space in the fourth class section was allocated for paupers and others such as the residents of workhouses, who were buried at public expense. This section was distinguished by the absence of monuments, the cost of which was beyond people’s means.

Another concession enjoyed by people purchasing space in the first and second class areas was that they were allowed to choose



a specific plot, whereas third and fourth class burial spaces were allocated.

Two chapels, linked by a colonnade, were built, the one for use by the Anglican community, the other by Non-Conformists. They were designed in Neo-Norman style by Charles Lynam, a local architect, who was also responsible for the Stoke-on-Trent Free Library and Baths, the North Staffordshire Infirmary and the Stoke Market Hall. Each of the chapels, which were designed to accommodate 100 people, was originally capped by a tower, but these have been removed as unsafe, and the chapels themselves are now closed for safety reasons.

Today, more than a century after it was first opened, the cemetery is now more park-like in appearance as the trees have matured, fulfilling Loudon’s vision.

In establishing its place in the development of landscape design, there is much in a Victorian cemetery to interest the garden historian. Its buildings and its monuments will have an appeal to all visitors interested in architectural and monument design, while it will always hold a fascination for anyone interested in the social priorities of a recently-past age.

In addition to the texts cited in the article, the following sources were also consulted:

Sarah Rutherford: “The Victorian Cemetery”, Shire Books (2011)

John Craddock: “Paxton’s Protégé”, York Publishing Services (2012)

Brian Parsons: “From Brooke Street to Brookwood: Nineteenth Century Funeral Reform and S Alban the Martyr Holborn Burial Society”, The Anglo-Catholic History Society (2014)

Various websites of individual cemeteries, including those of the Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

“FIRST AND BEST LOVED CHILD”

The present Croome Court, a Grade I listed building, dates from 1752, when the 6th Earl of Coventry commissioned the young Lancelot (“Capability”) Brown to design a new house in the more fashionable Palladian style, to replace the Jacobean structure which he had inherited and of which only the chimneys survive. He next invited him to create a park on the surrounding land, which was virtually a bog (and, according to its owner, “as hapless a spot as any in the island”). Brown, who numbered water management amongst his talents, drained the land by laying miles of culverts which fed into a lake and a mile-and-a-half-long artificial serpentine river, which took twelve years to dig out by hand. Apart from being part of Brown’s drainage system, the lake’s function was both aesthetic and recreational, adding to the scenic value of the parkland and providing family and guests with the opportunity for some gentle sailing.

This was the first of Brown’s estimated 280 commissions and, when finished, presented not only his employer but also future generations down to this very day (thanks to The National Trust) with an archetypal Brownian ‘natural’ landscape, incorporating water features such as his signature lake, softly undulating contours, belts of trees and vistas end-stopped by eye-catchers, and bringing the neighbouring parkland into closer contact with the house (It was not for nothing that William Cowper called Brown “the omnipotent magician”!).

Brown also replaced the medieval church (which occupied a site too close to the present house) with the present building, an early example of Gothic Revival architecture, siting it as an eye-catcher on higher ground, though the interior, described as “pure Georgian Gothic”, is the work of Robert Adam. The church houses a number of monuments to family members, some brought by the sixth Earl from the old church, though he himself is commemorated by a modest wall plaque.

The medieval village which also stood close to the house was removed in order to create an open park with uninterrupted views of the distant Malvern Hills, and the formal garden which lay on the south side was also swept away.

Brown also designed the Rotunda, a

domed circular building close to the house which gave views across to Bredon Hill and the Malverns, as well as the lakeside Grotto, constructed from tufa and limestone and covered with shells, coral and semi-precious stones which would have sparkled in the sunlight, but have now long gone..

Next to the entrance to the grotto reclines the Coade-stone figure of Sabrina, the water nymph believed to have inhabited the River Severn, on whose gentle curves Brown’s river is said to have been modelled.

Like the Druid, another feature to be found in other eighteenth-century landscapes, Sabrina is a potent symbol of Britain’s historic past, associated with nostalgically-remembered (or imagined) liberties. Made of Coade stone, Croome’s Druid cost twenty-four guineas and was erected in 1795.

The Earl, who inherited Croome Court at the age of twenty-eight, continued improving his estate right up until his death in 1809 at the age of eighty-seven. He gave Robert Adam an early opportunity to demonstrate his talent by engaging him to work on the house between 1761 and 1766 and to design a number of ‘follies’, including the Temple Greenhouse, an orangery to house the Earl’s collection of exotic plants, the Panorama Tower, a domed and circular

folly at the very edge of the park (though it was built by James Wyatt) and, it is thought, the Worcester Lodge, from which a carriageway once ran to the house from the main road to Croome from Worcester.

Pirton Tower, an eye-catcher perched on a rise to the north of the Court, and Dunstall Castle, now cut off from the park by trees, were both built as ruins, following contemporary fashion, the first to a design by James Wyatt, the second to a design by Robert Adam (Broadway Tower, built on a “beacon” hill overlooking the village of Broadway, was also designed by James Wyatt, commissioned by Lady Coventry, who wanted to see whether it could be seen at Croome Court, twenty-two miles away!).

In addition to commissioning these architectural features, whose locations served to underline the extent of the estate, the sixth Earl carried out extensive planting, assisted by his second wife, Barbara St. John, who shared her husband’s interest in exotics. Such was their enthusiasm that by the early nineteenth century only Kew Gardens had a greater number of species of plants and trees collected from all over the world.

Such was the fame which Croome Court enjoyed in the sixth Earl’s lifetime that, in 1788, it was visited by no less a personage



Culverts showing part of Brown’s drainage system



‘You have made a River where no water ever ran before’

than the monarch himself, George III, accompanied by a large royal party. This royal association continued with visits from Queen Victoria and King George V, and it also became the home of the Dutch Royal Family during World War II, as well as being chosen as a possible retreat for our own, should they ever have agreed to leave London (which they never did!).

The Coventry family left Croome Court in 1948, by which time the cost of maintaining house and pleasure grounds had become too heavy a financial burden, and it then passed through a number of owners, the first being the Archdiocese of Birmingham which, for the next thirty years, used the house as a school. It later became headquarters of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, renamed "Chaitanya College", and later still a conference centre before it was bought by the developer from whom it was purchased by The Croome Heritage Trust. In 2007 The National Trust acquired a ten-year lease from the Trust, which could be extended to 999 years provided The National Trust can raise at least £4.8 m to secure the Court's long-term financial future and to carry out essential restoration work

In carrying out this work, the Trust faces some difficult decisions. For example, during its occupation by its Hare Krishna owners, the unique eighteenth-century stucco garlands on the walls of the Dining Room, which was used for special ceremonies, were painted in bright colours, and the Trust must decide whether they should be restored or left as a reminder of the Court's more recent history. Similarly, a bar in one of the rooms serves as a reminder that the Court was once used as a conference centre.

Some of the furniture from the house is now in Kelmars Hall, in Northamptonshire, and the Trust hopes to successfully negotiate its return to Croome, but a step too far for even The National Trust is the restoration of the once-magnificent Tapestry Room to its former glory. Following a visit to Versailles, the sixth Earl ordered a set of tapestries from the Royal Gobelin Manufactory, but these, together with the Adams ceiling and furniture from the room, are now in the Grand Metropolitan Museum in New York, having been sold by the ninth Earl.

During World War Two, part of the estate was used as an airfield, at which radar systems were tested, and the present Visitors' Centre occupies what was once the sick quarters.

So far, the Trust has dredged the lake and river (and, in doing so, removing

fifty thousand cubic metres of silt), restored ornamental statues and buildings, and planted 45,000 trees and plants, drawing for historical accuracy on old estate maps and a guide book written in 1824 to which the head gardener, William Dean, was a contributor. The Trust has also benefited from the sixth Earl's habit of maintaining and then retaining a detailed record of what types of plants he purchased and where they were planted. Together, these documents have enabled the Trust to plant forty-five thousand trees and shrubs.

Much has been done already, but much remains to be done; for example, the Chinese Bridge which once spanned the river waits to be re-built, as does the boathouse, of which only the foundations now remain.

Members of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust visited Croome Court on a beautiful day in June and were not only fortunate in the weather but also in benefiting from the services of no fewer than four NT guides, whose extensive knowledge of and pride in both house and pleasure grounds greatly enhanced the enjoyment of the visit.

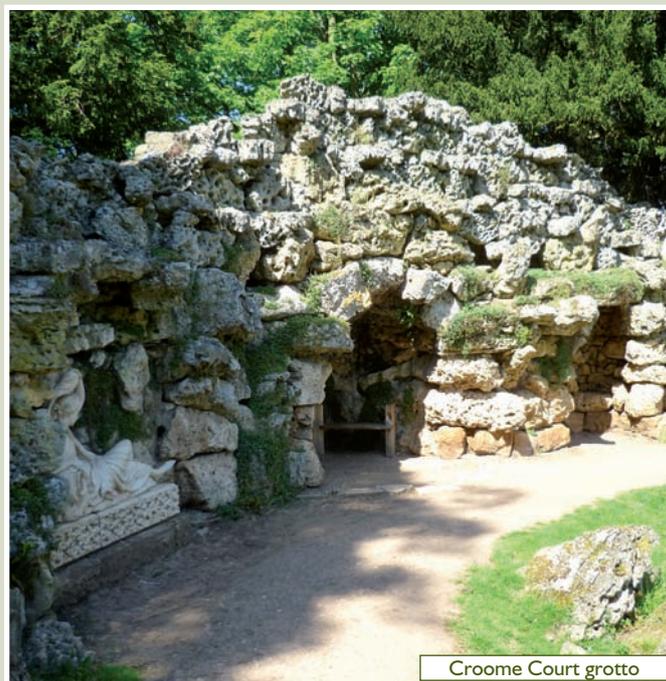
We left after a full day well-informed, and some of us no doubt a little tired, but carrying away with us images of a beautiful landscape and comfortable in the knowledge that this historic landscape was being sensitively restored and maintained for the enjoyment of future generations of visitors.



Church and Eye-catcher



Croome Court's unusual thatched Ice House



Croome Court grotto

“A Remarkable Survival”

The gardens at Castle Bromwich Hall, only five miles from the centre of Birmingham, are a unique example of the English Baroque Garden which date back to around 1700. They were designed by William Wynde, a Royalist Officer who was the husband of Sir John Bridgeman I’s cousin, Magdalen, but who had already laid out the original Baroque gardens at Powis Castle and would go on to work with William Talman at Buckingham House, later to be re-named Buckingham Palace when it became the residence of the monarch.

The gardens were laid out in the formal style popularised by the Dutch King William III, its principal practician being George London, whom William Wynde consulted and to whom the design of the Holly Maze is popularly attributed.

They were laid out in a formal arrangement of self-contained garden areas, some, like My Lady’s Border and the Best Garden, ornamental, others like the Kitchen Garden and the North Orchard, productive.

That the gardens were not swept away when formal gardens fell out of favour to be replaced by the fashion for ‘natural’ landscaping associated with ‘Capability’ Brown was due to the fact that the family moved to Weston Park following the marriage of Sir John Bridgeman II’s son, Sir Orlando Bridgeman, to Ann Newport, who succeeded to the Newport estate at Weston Park following the death of the second of her two brothers, both of whom died without heirs.

It was at Weston Park rather than Castle Bromwich Hall that Brown’s services were commissioned by the family, leaving later generations still to appreciate a style of gardening of which there are sadly few other examples surviving.

For the next six decades the Hall was let to tenants, the family returning again in 1820. The last member of the family to live there was Lady Ida Bridgeman, Countess of Bradford, under whom the gardens were revived, but, following her death in 1936, they went into decline, suffering extensively from vandalism, until, in 1982, a planning application for development in the surrounding parkland led to a detailed survey which in turn led to a rediscovery

of the gardens and an awareness of their historical importance.

As a consequence, the Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens Trust was set up in 1985 and, financed by grants and its own fund-raising efforts, as well as admission charges and shop sales, it continues its mission to restore and maintain the gardens and to educate the public, both young and old, to their significance.

Members of the SGPT visited the gardens for a guided tour in May of this year and were fortunate to have in Ann Brookman the services of a highly experienced and very knowledgeable guide. In addition to being a member of our Trust, Ann is also part-time Education Officer with the CBHGT and began the tour by apologising if from time to time she sounded like a school-mistress, explaining that her usual audience was made up of school children!

By way of a general introduction, Ann said that the main elements of the original gardens remained, and most of the plants would be recognised by the Bridgeman family, though some of the nineteenth-century planting had been preserved.

Our walk began at the Best Garden from which we viewed the Hall, once the headquarters of Bovis Homes but now a boutique hotel. Built in the Tudor style in 1599, a second floor was added between 1697 and 1699. The number of windows of its South Front (some of which are blind) conform to the need for symmetry (as well as a love of symbolism); twelve windows on its ground floor represent the disciples, six on the first floor the archangels and four on the top the Evangelists.

A magnificent pair of wrought-iron gates at the far end of the garden (which in 1831 cost £18. 00, plus a further six shillings to gild) allowed members of the family access to the adjacent church. To the modern visitor, a curious feature of these gates is that each pillar had an alcove in which household servants waited to hand the family their prayer books as they made their way to the church through the side door which once would have faced them but is now screened by a modern meeting room.

Having fulfilled this duty, the servants would then make their own way into the church – through a door at the back of the building!

Lady Bridgeman’s Garden, which adjoins the Best Garden, was the first part of the Gardens to be restored; here the beds are slightly domed to give prominence to prize plants such as tulips.



The gardens provide visitors with a multiplicity of attention-catching features, both horticultural and architectural: the Maze, based on George London and Henry Wise's design at Hampton Court (though this may not have been added until the nineteenth century); the Holly Walk, a wide gravel path with hedges of variegated holly on either side; the Archery Lawn, now used for fund-raising events; the North Orchard, where fifty different varieties of apples and pears, all available to gardeners in the 740s, are grown; the Melon Ground, where both melons and pineapples were grown, the pineapple being a symbol of hospitality to be displayed on the table when entertaining; the Secret Garden, where, it is alleged, Benjamin Disraeli met the ladies when visiting the Hall!

Prominent amongst the architectural features are the Summer House (or Music Room) and the Green House (or Orangery), which stand at either end of the Holly Walk. Built at about the same time, that is, around 1729, they are very similar in style, though the coat-of-arms above each doorway and the statuary along the roofline are dissimilar.

Any fountains which might have been in the gardens are long since gone, but

outside the boundary wall there are three ponds. The North and South Ponds provided a source of fish to supplement the family's diet. When the North Pond was restored the remains of the wooden sluice system was discovered. The South Pond was not dug out but a spinney area created around a smaller pond is now used by school parties for pond-dipping.

The third Pond is the ornamental Mirror Pond situated on the central line of the house and garden. It can be seen from within the Gardens through the *claire-voie* that pierces the boundary wall. This allowed a view down an avenue of trees into the countryside beyond. The avenue remains, but the view is now of houses and the BT tower in the centre of Birmingham. The Mirror Pond has recently been restored with the aid of a Grant from Awards for All.

The Cold Bath built by Sir John Bridgeman II in 1733 also survives (Cold bathing had had a powerful advocate in Sir John Floyer, "Physician of Lichfield", who had published "An Essay to Prove Cold Bathing Both Safe and Useful" in 1702). Once it had a robing room, a plunge bath and a fireplace, though no roof, but it is now derelict and not likely to be restored. As one of our party pointed out, it



Ornamental Gates



Best Garden

pre-dated by more than 250 years the ice-bath favoured by modern athletes!

Blessed with good weather and a guide who generously shared her knowledge and understanding of the gardens with us, this visit was undoubtedly one which members will recall with pleasures for a long time to come.

A QUICK NOTE ON MONK'S WALK

There is a proposed development being put forward by Pegasus Homes for sheltered accommodation on the site of the Lichfield Library car park.

The Monks Walk Group have been in consultation with the design team to ensure that The Monks Walk continues to have access for the people of Lichfield to enjoy this secluded open space.

It appears in the outline proposal that the garden forms an important part of the overall site layout and will continue to

have the involvement of volunteers for the foreseeable future.

Please be sure to visit The Monks Walk when you are in Lichfield.

Sarah Ashmead, Co-ordinator, The Monks Walk Project.

Officers Of The Trust

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“ANOTHER ACTIVE YEAR”

Introducing the Trust's new President

This year's Annual General Meeting took place at Blithfield Hall, the home of the Trust's new President, Charlie Bagot-Jewitt, who has accepted the Trust's invitation following the resignation of Lord Cormack.

Mr. Bagot-Jewitt, who may be best known to members as the former Chief Executive of the National Memorial Arboretum, has provided the Newsletter with the following introductory profile:

“You asked for a few lines about my background. I'll keep it focused towards Gardens and Parks, which I have always enjoyed even as a young child. My first degree was in Economics and Social History and Geography, and I came to this through my enjoyment of historic landscapes fostered by reading “The Making of the English Landscape” by W. G. Hoskyns as a thirteen-year-old. Indeed, this also led me to study at Exeter University, Hoskyn's alma mater.

I was lucky enough to attend Exeter as a Naval Cadet scholar, but through my time there (close to many wonderful gardens in the South West, and where, at the time, a friend of my father, Michael Trinick, was running the National Trust in Cornwall) and during my subsequent Naval Career I have always enjoyed visiting as many gardens as I could. When living in various naval married quarters, I also tried my best to create gardens out of almost uncultivable plots of land – giving myself a budget of £100 to spend!

Of course, coming to Blithfield has been wonderful, and I spend about six hours each week in the summer cutting and trying to keep on top of the Pleasure Gardens at the back of the Hall. In the winter I spend almost as long cutting up fallen wood for the fire. We are thrilled with a project that has now started to restore Blithfield's magnificent orangery, one of only a few remaining creations by ‘Athenian’ Stuart, and are very grateful for the support of Mr. A. Taylor too!

It was also a huge honour to be Chief Executive of the National Memorial Arboretum for nearly seven years. It was a rare opportunity to be one's own ‘Capability’ Brown and have a small part in developing a young planned landscape and, even more exciting, to plan and re-plan some plots, groves and memorials. Producing a new ‘Landscape Master Plan’ was definitely my favourite part of the job, and Paul Kennedy and I spent many happy hours on this task. Many others in Staffordshire had a hand at various stages, including Mike Walker, Gardens and Estate Manager at Trentham, who introduced me to Tom Stuart-Smith. Many other famous gardeners visited, too.

It is a huge honour and privilege to be President, and I will endeavour to use the opportunity to help the Trust where I can and to learn some more about our country's wonderful formal and informal landscapes and gardens”.

In tendering his resignation the outgoing President, Lord Cormack, wrote: “It has been a privilege to be your President, and I do hope we can keep in touch on a regular basis. I would be delighted to welcome members to the House of Lords again and to Lincoln, and I do hope the Trust will continue to flourish”. He concluded by sending the Trust every positive wish for the future.

Chairman's Report

Below is the report by the Chairman, Alan Taylor, slightly edited, which was presented to this year's Annual General Meeting by the Acting Chairman, Sarah Ashmead, in the absence of the Chairman through illness:

“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. As you will have gathered, we are currently in need of a Treasurer – a vital post in any organisation – and also have vacancies on the Council of Management where colleagues have stood down...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 our business front I am pleased to report that the Trust has enjoyed another active year in 2012-2013. The financial report to this meeting has indicated that our finances remain sound.

Our membership numbers are holding steady, but we would always welcome new members. Please do encourage your friends and others with an interest in Staffordshire's gardens and parks to join 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 fourth year, having gone live in January 2011. It remains free to the Trust. It contains information about the Trust and how to join, and our current and future activities. Council intend that it will play an increasing rôle in how we communicate with members and the wider public in future years, both because that is the way of the world and also because it is a useful way of keeping our costs under control.

We have been recording statistics on the website's traffic since September 2013. This shows that in 2012 the average number of Unique Visitors (that is, individual visitors, not repeat visits or search engines) was 256 a month. In 2013 this rose to 305. For the first six months of 2014, this figure is 535 – traffic has more than doubled in two years. In fact, we reached a record in April this year of 583 visitors in one month. The top countries visiting are (in order) the USA, the UK, Germany, Canada, Australia, Mainland Europe, France, China and the Czech Republic.

The online SGPT Newsletter download is becoming increasingly popular, and other Trusts are mailing their own Newsletters to us for inclusion, but nobody is ‘broadcasting’ each other's at the moment, probably due to restrictions on web-space – this is certainly the case for us – , but we may agree ‘guest appearances’ in future if the Council of Management agrees.

We are one of the few Trusts who actually make their Newsletter available on the web, or, for that matter, an archive or even a list of sites. Email to the website is monitored daily, and there is certainly a lot more electronic communication these days, with several communications each week to various Trust officials. The site is also receiving much more ‘commercial’ mail – ‘special offers’, book launches, etc. How we handle this will have to be reviewed by Council in the near future. Trust email addresses will have to be re-structured in the coming weeks to better manage the traffic.

Encouragingly, Web Browser statistics indicate that a lot more smart phones and tablets are accessing the site. Also, we can estimate that one third of all visitors are adding the site to their list of ‘favourites’, although this can only be an estimate. Plans to re-vamp the site is a medium-term goal, but with all the indicators so encouraging it is not a high priority.

As you will gather from this brief report, the website is a vibrant and growing area of our work. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Richard and Jackie Moseley, who have put the website together for us and manage it impeccably, with Jax as “mailbox” and Richard as designer and editor. A reminder of the site address: www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org.

On the planning side, the Trust has been consulted on a number of planning applications throughout the year, both in present-day Staffordshire and in the Black Country. One member of Council has specific responsibility for this work now, and we will be able to focus our comments more sharply. The Trust has also responded to the HS2 public consultation, objecting to its potential impact on several parks, including Ingestre and Swynnerton. Unsurprisingly, we have not received an acknowledgement.

On the Activities side, the 2013 programme was again designed to offer members the opportunity to appreciate the variety of approaches to garden and landscape design to be found within and immediately beyond our County. We visited the Georgian orangery under restoration in the grounds of a Jacobean mansion at Ingestre; a rare example of an early eighteenth-century garden at Melbourne Hall, in Derbyshire; an early nineteenth-century Arts and Crafts house and grounds on the outskirts of Wolverhampton, Wightwick Manor; an eighteenth-century landscape under restoration at Hagley Hall, in Worcestershire; and a six-acre garden less than twenty years old and already being compared to Hidcote, Wilkins Pleck, near Newcastle-under-Lyme.

In the autumn, as a contribution to a nation-wide commemoration of the centenary of the outbreak of World War I, the Trust also embarked on a programme of research into Staffordshire's war memorial gardens to which it is hoped members will feel able to contribute.

Two issues of the Newsletter were published, both of which benefited in presentation by the introduction of colour. Every member receives a copy, and a copy is also sent to every public library in Staffordshire and to every other County Gardens Trust. The Trust is especially grateful to Colin Fletcher, of LGD Solutions, who typesets the Newsletter and oversees its production.

The Trust continues to identify gardens likely to be of interest to members; this can be a protracted and sometimes frustrating experience, and we have reason to be particularly grateful to Joe Hawkins, Ann Brookman, Francis Colella, and Richard and Jackie Moseley for their support in organising the programme. We shall continue to strive to provide members with visits to places of interest and would welcome any suggestions.

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. 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.

We also thank our out-going Treasurer for her work in managing our finances and ensuring that we remain solvent and prudent in our expenditure. My special thanks are due to all my colleagues on the Trust's Council of Management for their continued input and support; and also to yourselves, our members, without whose interest and encouragement we would not be able to continue. I offer my 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.”

At the conclusion of the formal business of the evening, members were given short talks by Mr. Bagot-Jewitt and by Mr. Jonathan Hyde, owner of Cloister House, part of the now-divided Hall, before being taken on a guided tour of the grounds.

Members can now look forward to a study day at Blithfield Hall next October.