

# 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



## A LOST LANDSCAPE REDISCOVERED

When, in 1758, Arthur Chichester, 5th Earl and later 1st Marquess of Donegall, bought Fisherwick Hall, between the villages of Whittington and Elford, near Lichfield, it was a 'fine old timbered and gabled hall' built in the late sixteenth century.

He then commissioned 'Capability' Brown to design and build a new house in the fashion of the times and more befitting to his dignity, a task which lasted from 1766 till 1779 and cost £200,000. No expense was spared; floors and fireplaces were of marble, doors of mahogany, walls were painted or hung with silk. Furniture was designed by Joseph Bonomi, an Italian-born, London-based architect who had worked for Robert Adam and who, towards the end of his life, was appointed architect to St. Peter's, Rome; the ceiling of the principal drawing-room was painted by an Italian artist, John Francis Rigaud, who specialised in decorative painting for the town and country houses of the nobility. He commissioned Thomas Gainsborough to paint the family's portrait and filled the house with antiquities and objets d'art.

By this time, Brown was no stranger to Staffordshire, having already worked at Chillington, Ingestre, Weston, Trentham and Himley. He had been commissioned by an earlier owner, Samuel Hill, to prepare a plan, but, when Hill died in 1757, Brown had not yet submitted his proposals. Arthur Chichester, who, in spite of his title, never lived in Ireland and was, in fact, educated at Oxford and Eton, instructed Brown to design both house and park, and Brown responded by designing a house in the fashionable Palladian style very similar to the house he had designed at Croome Court. He went on to landscape the park,

increasing its length and creating a ha-ha, extending the length of an existing lake and laying out a second, connected to the first by a cascade, building an orangery and planting 10,000 trees, including oaks, elms and firs (which earned the Marquess a medal from the Society of Arts for planting the greatest number of trees in that year).

The result was, in the words of Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre, "one of his most attractive parks", which Arthur Chichester stocked with deer and game. Several entrance lodges were built, a deer cot and kennels were added, a 'Ladies Botanical Garden' complete with a Chinese pavilion was laid out, and a new carriageway leading to the house was laid down, flanked by trees which, in keeping with Brown's established style, prevented visitors from seeing the house until the last minute. In another characteristic flourish, Brown used the churches of distant Tamworth and nearby Elford as eye-catchers.

Sadly, such extravagance, when added to his son's addiction to gambling (in those days, there was a racecourse just outside Lichfield, where the Marquess also had a



Conservatory



Gate Posts once part of the main entrance

town house), proved an unsustainable drain on his resources; and after the Marquess's death the estate was sold off in 1808, half to Sir Robert Peel, of Drayton Manor; half to Richard Bagot Howard, owner of the Elford estate.\* Subsequently, Brown's landscape was divided into nine farms and most of his trees felled and sold. The

house was demolished six years later and its contents and architectural features dispersed; for a number of years the magnificent Corinthian portico fronted a hotel in Walsall until the hotel itself was demolished.

The lakes, now reduced to ponds, are buried deep in thick woodland, though the cascade still functions, and a length of the ha-ha has been cleared of brambles.

The magnificent Orangery, otherwise known as "The Greenhouse", which was once fronted by a Corinthian portico, was used for many years as a cow-shed and has become so ruinous that, in spite of its age, English Heritage has declined to list it on the grounds that not enough of it has survived.

The stable block has now been converted into privately-owned residences.

Despite these depredations, enough remained to make a guided tour of the site led by someone familiar with surviving landmarks interesting to garden historians, and such a person is Annamarie Stone, who took our party on an informative walk round that part of Fisherwick Park which now forms Woodhouse Farm. The farm, which covers twenty-two acres, occupies land which was once the back lawn and cherry orchard of the now-demolished Hall, and includes the Walled Garden. Annamarie and her husband, Andrew, run Woodhouse Farm, previously worked since the 1960s by Andrew's late father, Annamarie undertaking the responsibility of running the Walled Garden, while Andrew runs the farm.

Prior to being taken on a guided tour of the Walled Garden led by Alan, the head gardener, the party was given a short account of the more recent history of the site by Annamarie, who explained that, after prolonged negotiations with the owners, Birmingham City Council, to whom the farm had been donated for the recreational use of its citizens in 1936, Andrew and Annamarie took over the tenancy in 2009, though neither had had any formal training in agriculture, Andrew's previous occupation having been an electrician and Annamarie's a beautician.

They found the Walled Garden, which pre-dates the house and may possibly be the largest in the County, to be just a field, used, Annamarie thought, first for planting agricultural crops, and, latterly, for grazing horses. She speculated that this might have been because there already was a walled

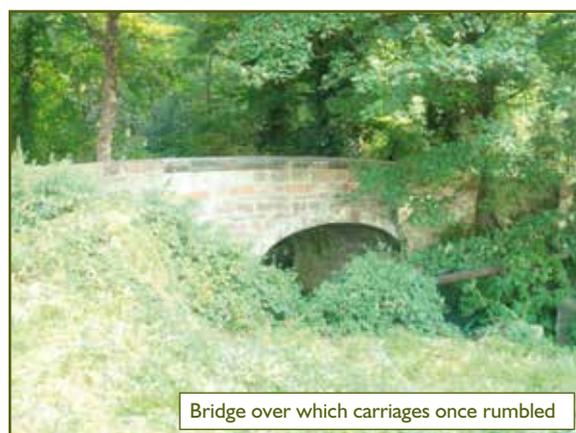
garden at Elford, and Richard Bagot Howard would not have wanted the expense of running two labour-intensive walled gardens.

No plans had survived which could give them any indication as to how the garden had originally been planted, so Andrew and Annamarie set about putting it back to how they thought it might have been. Currently, it is laid out in four large rectangular beds, planted in rotation, three to grow a wide variety of vegetables such as beetroot, parsnip, onion, garlic, asparagus and vines, and the fourth of soft fruit.

Though there is evidence that the South Wall of the Garden was once heated and may have supported a hothouse, its honey-combed wall continues to exude heat absorbed from the sun and can reach temperatures of 15°C (such is the size of the Garden that, conversely, the North Wall acts as a frost-trap!). This enables nectarines, peaches, apricots, grapes and figs to be grown along it. Cherries, plums, pears and apples are grown on the adjoining West Wall.

Woodhouse Farm is part of Community Supported Agriculture, a scheme promoted by the Soil Association to encourage partnerships between farmers and their community through an arrangement by which local people sign up to buy produce for a season, thus guaranteeing them a weekly share of fresh, seasonal produce and the farmer the security of knowing that he has a regular, reliable market. In addition to the produce from the Walled Garden, Andrew and Annamarie sell beef from Irish Moiled Cows and pork from Gloucester Old Spot, both raised on the farm. A farm shop is open on Tuesday and Saturday afternoons throughout the year.

In furtherance of a policy of encouraging community involvement, the farm offers opportunities for classes in planting and cookery and has community areas which can be hired for parties, group visits or workshops, while afternoons are organised for volunteers to carry out clearance work which protects and exposes some of the historic features of the landscape like the ha-ha. The farm entertains visits from local organisation such as schools, Scouts, Cubs and Brownies, and Women's Institutes and is also engaged in a project designed to help those overcoming mental health problems.



Bridge over which carriages once rumbled



Walled Garden

It is heartening to find couples like Andrew and Annamarie Stone who can look beyond primary commercial needs and recognise the heritage attached to the historic environment (albeit in this case depleted) in which they work, and, while striving to make a living, also work to ensure that that heritage is not completely lost to later generations.

\* Elford Estate followed a downward trajectory very similar to that of Fisherwick. In 1936 its owner, Francis Howard Paget, "desirous of preserving the estate for all time for the benefit of the public", donated the Hall, built in 1758, and surrounding land to Birmingham City Council, who used it to store its arts treasures during World War II. Thereafter, its condition was allowed to deteriorate until it was finally demolished in 1964 and the land used for housing.

However, the task of restoring the Walled Garden, which was once planted with half a mile of fruit trees, has been undertaken by a group of local residents who got together to submit a successful application for a £1/2m from the Heritage Lottery Fund in order to develop the garden for community use. The Elford Hall Garden Project, when completed, will, amongst other objectives, have restored the Victorian gardens, established allotments, laid down a bowling green and laid out a tennis court.

# “One of the prettiest retreats it is possible to conceive”

Nicholas Pevsner’s description of Biddulph Old Hall as “a late 17th Century house of no pretension which is attached to an Elizabethan Mansion sacked in the Civil War” does little credit to its extraordinary history. Members learnt about this extraordinary history when, in the company of members of the Staffordshire Historic Buildings Trust, they were entertained by the present owners, Nigel Daly and Brian Vowles.

The building probably originated sometime between 1490 and 1520 as a simple hall with kitchen attached. A tower was added in 1530. The property, by then known as ‘Biddulph Hall’, was extensively remodelled and enlarged by John Biddulph after 1558, eventually taking the form seen today of a large irregular residential block with forecourt and gatehouse. The Biddulphs were a recusant family with Jesuit connections. Recent research suggests that the pre-eminent architect of the Elizabethan era, Robert Smythson, who worked extensively for the Earls of Shrewsbury, another influential Catholic family, may have been responsible for the design of the domed tower and forecourt. The Biddulphs espoused the Royalist cause in the English Civil War, and in 1643 the Hall was subjected to a prolonged siege before falling to Commonwealth troops in the face of a determined bombardment. Subsequently, the building was partially demolished to prevent it from being re-garrisoned, and pillaged of its stone and ironwork

Towards the end of the seventeenth century the Hall was re-occupied and enlarged, using materials from the ruined mansion.

The house underwent further extensions in the nineteenth century, when a two-storey wing was added as a Catholic chapel, later adapted as an artist’s studio by Robert Bateman, though the quality of its construction left something to be desired, as the collapse of an external staircase during the occupancy of the present owners has demonstrated!

James Bateman, builder of Biddulph Grange, acquired the house, by then known as “The Old Hall”, as a folly in 1861. He set about connecting it to the Grange by laying down a walk through a steep woodland valley alongside the Clough stream, a project which involved building several bridges, two dams, a tunnel running under the road and the construction of many steps. His lavish expenditure, both here and at The Grange, led to straitened circumstances, and, in 1871, he was forced to sell the Biddulph estate, including Biddulph Old Hall and The Clough.

He did, however, arrange a lifetime tenancy for his third son, Robert, a member of the second-generation Pre-Raphaelite group of artists. Robert’s work was much admired in his own time, but his reputation has since lost some of its lustre.

Robert continued to develop the landscape around the Old Hall until, in 1887, a local writer could describe The Clough as “a very paradise of woodland scenery” where “artistic effect has aided nature in creating one of the prettiest retreats it is possible to conceive”.

Once popular with artists and photographers, it subsequently entered a long period of decline; the walks were overgrown, the dams destroyed, and loads of debris, tipped into the valley, filled the lakes with rubbish of all kinds, including the ubiquitous shopping trolleys!

The present owners, recognising its significance and the status which it once enjoyed, have begun the necessarily-protracted process of recovery and

restoration, starting with in-depth research and extending their ownership to 85% of the walk, an area of seven acres. The worst of the tipped rubbish has now been cleared, including builder’s rubble dumped into the first of the waterfalls, and two of the stone flight of steps have been excavated. They have already commissioned the clearing of some of the fallen trees and a survey of surviving specimen trees planted by the Batemans.

As our walk through the partially-cleared landscape revealed, much remains to be done before the site is fully restored to its former glory; fallen trees, overgrown vegetation and self-seeds need to be cleared, paths excavated and their exact route established, the lower dam rebuilt and the lake reformed, lost specimen trees, ferns and water-plants replanted.

All this will need support from both qualified professionals and volunteers, and the assistance of the media in publicising the project and helping to raise the necessary funding, and Nigel and Brian are anxious to engage the interests of local groups in their project. They welcome arranged visits and are also holding a series of open days for the general public. The visit allowed members to appreciate the strong appeal that the natural beauty of the walk once exercised on earlier visitors, and any SGPT members unable to take part in the Trust’s visit in June might well wish to avail themselves of the second chance offered by one of these open days. Details of these open days can be obtained by emailing Nigel Daly at [nigel@nigeldaly.co.uk](mailto:nigel@nigeldaly.co.uk).



Biddulph Old Hall



Wall showing impact of cannon fire (on the left)



The Clough

# “CONDITOR HORTI FELICITATIS AUCTOR”\*

On a beautifully sunny afternoon in May, swept from time to time by a cooling breeze, more than fifty members and friends - many replete from an excellent pre-visit lunch at the Wilton Court Hotel in nearby Ross-on-Wye - descended by coach and car on The Laskett, Sir Roy Strong’s iconic garden set in rural Herefordshire off the A49 between Hereford and Ross-on-Wye.

We were welcomed by Fiona Fysch, the garden manager and Sir Roy’s private secretary, who explained that, regretfully, Sir Roy had been unable to greet the party in person owing to a previous engagement in Stratford-on-Avon. However, we were each provided with an audio guide pre-recorded by Sir Roy, which at least allowed us to feel that we were being led round the garden by the great man himself!

Strictly speaking, The Laskett is not a garden, but a series of gardens, each recording a significant moment in the lives and careers of both Sir Roy and his wife, the late Julia Trevelyan Oman. Not for nothing is The Laskett described as “an autobiographical garden”.

And what lives they have been! Director of The National Portrait Gallery between 1967 and 1974, when, aged thirty-eight, he became the youngest Director of The Victoria and Albert Museum, Sir Roy retired from that post in 1987 to pursue a career as a writer and consultant, his subjects covering the history of the Arts, of monarchy, of gardens and gardening, and of feasting.

In 1973, he married Julia Trevelyan Oman, one of the most distinguished theatre designers of the second half



The Laskett



The Howdah Court

of the twentieth century, who worked with some of the leading figures in the world of drama, opera and ballet, such as Jonathan Miller and Sir Frederick Ashton. That year, they purchased The Laskett, an early Victorian house with a conventional garden of lawn, shrubbery and rose bed, which they spent the next three decades developing into the remarkable pleasure garden which it has become today. In 1975, a field they owned which had been rented to a neighbouring farmer was drawn into the garden when the farmer

gave up the tenancy, and, together, they set about designing the present garden, which now covers four acres.

Inspiration was drawn from a number of sources, the principal one being Hidcote Manor, in Gloucestershire, where, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Lawrence Johnston, having similarly extended the grounds surrounding the house by acquiring the fields which surrounded it, created a garden comprised of a series of ‘rooms’, each with its own distinctive character. In both gardens, the planting reflects the Arts and Crafts’ preference for native flowers and shrubs, though this is by no means the only style apparent in the gardens; the parterre of green and golden yew recalls the more formal Elizabethan and Jacobean tradition, while the long vista of the Elizabethan Tudor Walk, inspired by the Lime Walk at Sissinghurst (though twice as long), which terminates at the Shakespeare Monument, recalls the gardens of the Italian Renaissance.

The Garden, which claims to be the largest privately-owned formal garden created since 1945, constantly surprises and delights the visitor, who passes through a series of enclosed spaces, many dedicated to a national event (the Silver Jubilee, the Diamond Jubilee), an



Silver Jubilee Garden, with Rose Garden beyond and Triumphal Arch in background



Newly-created 80th Birthday Garden

achievement (Sir Roy's twenty years as Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum), a personal landmark (his fiftieth birthday), a valued friendship (the society photographer Sir Cecil Beaton, the ballet dancer and choreographer Sir Frederick Ashton) in the lives of the garden's creators. Thus, close to the house, the Die Fledermaus Walk, a long gallery of yew and beech, commemorates Julia's production of that opera at the Royal Opera House, while the Pierpoint Morgan Rose Garden is named after the library in New York where Sir Roy gave a series of lectures in 1974, the fee for which paid for the garden (Indeed, the gardens were developed and enlarged as and when funds became available).



The Elizabethan Tudor Walk



The Shakespeare Monument

Similarly, elsewhere in the garden the Hilliard Garden is so named after the Elizabethan miniaturist, about whom Sir Roy wrote a book, while "Glyndebourne" commemorates Julia's production of Richard Strauss's opera "Arabella" there.

Other gardens identify themselves by what has been planted in them: the Spring Garden; the Rose Garden; the Christmas Orchard (which houses a collection of old apple varieties, pears and a rare variety of quince); the Scandinavian Grove (planted with silver birch).



The Crowned Column in the Elizabeth Tudor Garden



The Gardener in the Gardener's Garden

Sculpture and statuary feature prominently and continue the theme of remembrance:

a pinnacle from Nicholas Hawksmoor's All Souls College, in Oxford, commemorates Sir Charles Oman, Julia's grandfather, who was a fellow of the college and the University's Chichele Professor of Modern History; four pieces of statuary from the old Palace of Westminster serve as a reminder that Sir Roy is currently High Bailiff and Searcher of the Sanctuary of Westminster Abbey and also commemorate the publication in 1996 of Sir Roy's book, "The Story of Britain".

The largest structure is the Colonnade, an open pavilion supported by four Ionic pillars which provides shelter for visitors

overtaken in the course of their tour of the gardens by adverse weather as well as space for holding events. It faces a formal parterre surrounded by hedges of box.

For Sir Roy, a walk through the gardens, which has allowed him and his wife Julia to express their artistic, literary and horticultural talents, must be a poignant and, since the death of his wife, a painful walk down Memory Lane, in which he is reminded not only of his many past achievements shared with Julia but also of long friendships now ended.

The National Trust declined Sir Roy's offer to leave The Laskett to the Trust on the grounds that it "failed to reach the high rung of historical and

national importance", advising him that an independent charitable trust be established instead. Sir Roy's response was to threaten to leave instructions in his will for the gardens to be razed a year after his death, a natural enough reaction to the Trust's rejection of his generous offer, but the many who have been fortunate enough to enjoy the multiplicity of delights the gardens offer will be delighted to learn that they will now be bequeathed to Perennial, a UK charity dedicated to horticulturists in need, providing a range of support services for those working in, have worked in or retired from the industry (and known until 2003 as "The Gardeners' Royal Benevolent Society").

\* "They who Plant a Garden Plant Happiness"

**Footnote: The Trust is extremely fortunate that one of its members, Michael Faarup, was able to use family connections to arrange the rare privilege of a visit on a Saturday. Michael also arranged for lunch to be taken at The Wilton Court Hotel before the visit, and the Trust wishes to put on record its profound gratitude.**

# “One of Shropshire’s outstanding attractions”

In July, members of the Trust visited the Grade II-listed Lilleshall Hall and Park, where they were joined for the visit by members of the Shropshire Parks and Gardens Trust, in whose county the Hall is located.

We were met by Phillip Coxill, Operations Grounds Manager, who began work at Lilleshall as a groundsman looking after its many pitches and has now graduated to managing the grounds not only here but at all three National Sports Centres, in Shropshire, Berkshire and Nottinghamshire.

Before a tour of the main gardens the group was given an introductory talk by Sarah Ashmead on the history of the Lilleshall estate. Ashmead-Price, Landscape Planning and Design Consultants, have prepared a Landscape Master Plan for improvements to the pleasure grounds, avenues and wider estate at Lilleshall.

The present Hall was built by Jeffrey Wyattville for the 1st Duke of Sutherland in 1831, but its history extends much further back in time. The estate was originally part of the demesne of Lilleshall Abbey, a once-powerful Augustinian foundation built between 1145 and 1148 which entertained two kings, Henry III and Richard II, and whose impressive ruins are now in the care of English Heritage. Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1543, it was acquired by James Leveson, a wealthy and influential Wolverhampton wool-merchant.

Ownership then passed to Sir William Leveson-Gower, the first in a long line of a prominent political family who went on to acquire a succession of titles until, in 1833, Sir George Leveson-Gower became the first Duke of Sutherland.

While Sir George is perhaps best known for his part in the infamous Highland Clearances, his wife, Elizabeth, already a Countess in her own right when she married him, will be remembered for her part in the creation of the gardens at Trentham Hall, the family’s principal seat in Staffordshire, where she introduced ideas first developed at Lilleshall. The designed estate and pleasure grounds were developed with the ‘new’ Hall, primarily by the 2nd Duke of Sutherland and his young wife, Harriet, who were given the estate when they married. An ‘instant’ landscape was required to give a suitable backdrop to the house and to screen the industrial landscape to the north,

where lime kilns predominated around the old Hall in Lilleshall village. Work began on the gardens in 1827 with the creation of formal terraces, lawns and planting, including the remarkable feat of bringing in and re-planting already-mature trees. The pleasure gardens and parkland continued to be developed after the house was completed in 1831.

Lilleshall Hall was just one estate owned by the family, who also owned a London house, Stafford House, in Berkeley Square, Cliveden House in Buckinghamshire, Dunrobin Castle in the Northern Highlands, and, of course, Trentham Hall. Each was visited in turn throughout the year, Lilleshall being occupied over Easter for hunting and parties, when it was the task of the head gardener to ensure that the gardens were at their finest during the four weeks of the family’s residence. This was achieved by employing between twenty and thirty gardeners, compared with the five or six employed today, although the latter have the advantage of working with far superior equipment!

However, Lilleshall became for a time the family’s principal Midlands residence when Trentham Hall was being extended in the 1830s and again between 1900 and 1910, when Trentham Hall was being sold.

After a period of inactivity, the gardens were renovated by the fourth Duke and his Duchess, Millicent, between 1890 and 1911. The walled Kitchen Gardens were extended, the Dutch Garden constructed, and improvements made to the Dial Garden and the Italian Water Garden. A Peach House, subsequently demolished, was added in 1898 to an enlarged walled kitchen garden area. Around this time, the family were preparing to abandon Trentham as a consequence of the foul-smelling



The Dial Garden

pollution affecting the nearby river, and the estate was plundered for material which could be used in developing the grounds at Lilleshall. For example, the Estate Ledger Book of 1908 records that part of the stonework was brought from Trentham at the same time as the Temple structures were moved here as the Trentham estate was sold.

The fifth Duke sold the bulk of the Lilleshall estate at the outbreak of World War I in 1914, and in 1918 Sir John Lee bought Lilleshall Hall and the remaining fifty acres of garden. In 1927 the estate was sold to Herbert Ford, a wealthy Ironbridge industrialist married to Alice Perrins, whose family gave their name to the famous sauce. Under his ownership the grounds were developed as a pleasure park complete with a golf course and a narrow-gauge railway which ran through Abbey Wood.

During World War II, the Hall became an orphanage and the grounds were extensively farmed; and in 1949 Herbert Ford, faced with a daunting bill to restore the Hall and gardens to their pre-war state, sold the estate to the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR), who opened it as a sport centre, thus continuing the tradition established by Herbert Ford of offering recreational activities to the public.

The registered Park and Garden is now occupied by the National Sports Centre, which is operated by Serco Leisure on behalf of Sport England. The National Sports Centre covers around 134 hectares in the centre of the 200 hectare Registered Parkland, which includes Abbey Wood and



Italian Water Garden



The Temple Loggia

Gorse Covert woodlands beyond Lilleshall Hall.

The party was then introduced to the newly-created Discovery Trail, designed to open up the garden to controlled public access and soon to be available as a mobile phone app. The walk, led by Phil and Sarah, began at the Apple Walk, progressing through a series of arches once covered with apple trees and climbing roses, but now planted with vines, wisteria and clematis. Now half its original length, it is intended to re-instate it as a vine walk.

The walk then took us down to the Temple Loggia, stone arches which once formed part of a colonnade at Trentham Hall and moved to Lilleshall in 1912. A smaller fragment, known as the Temple, serves as an eye-catcher in another part of the grounds. Passing through a wilder part of the grounds planted with oak and rhododendron, we reached the Pet Cemetery, dominated by a large stone plinth

crowned with a ball which marked the grave of Czar, a Russian wolfhound brought back from Moscow in the nineteenth century.

The parkland contains a huge variety of trees, tens of thousands having been recorded as planted throughout the 1830s. As well as native species such as oak, beech and silver birch, they include cypress, juniper, cedar, wellingtonia, spruce, fir, pine and maple (Even before reaching the Hall, the visitor will have travelled down a mile-and-a-half long avenue lined with woodland belts and a wellingtonia avenue, having entered through the Golden Gates, a replica of the gates at the front of Buckingham Palace!).

We then made our way back to the balustraded Italian Water Garden laid out in 1910; at the centre is an octagonal lily pond and fountain surrounded by four lozenge-shaped ponds bordered by flower beds. Plans are in hand to improve the water flow and bring the

fountain back into full play.

We continued through the Dial Garden, a formal flower garden so called because of its circular shape, on to the raised terrace at the front of the house which took us along the Duchess Walk past the Dutch Garden; once planted with roses but now under grass, it will be eventually restored as a rose garden.

Before re-entering the Hall, where cake and tea awaited us, we had the opportunity to pause for a while and from our elevated position on the terrace to admire the scope and absorb the detail of the garden spread out below us.

This was our third visit this summer to an historic garden under sensitive restoration, and it is heartening to all who cherish our garden heritage that there are individuals and organisations willing to dedicate their time and their resources to ensure its survival.



## PRESENTATION

Catherine Thorpe, SGPT Treasurer, presents Lord Cormack with an engraved Tutbury Glass rosebowl to mark his retirement as President of the Trust. In response, Lord Cormack wrote to the Chairman: 'I was deeply touched, and most appreciative, to receive that marvellous engraved bowl which the Trust so kindly gave me to mark my retirement as President. It is something that we shall always treasure in our home and will bring back happy memories....!'

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# KEITH MALCOLM GOODWAY (1930-2015)

**Keith was born in Southend and brought up in Surrey. In 1954 he joined the staff at the University College of North Staffordshire at Keele, where the first biology course in the country had been established in 1950. Keith will forever be remembered for his association with Keele but also for his careful scholarship, wise, measured advice and a dry humour betraying his appreciation of irony and the ridiculous.**

He was resident on campus, and married Cordelia Lamb, a former Keele student, in 1957. He became known, inter alia, for his study of kettle holes (depressions left by blocks of glacial ice, the water surface later covering over with bog vegetation). He conducted field trips to a 40-acre natural mere, Copmere, near Eccleshall, to study eutrophication, and was later involved, as an expert in the native flora, in assisting Land Use Consultants in re-vegetating the Park Hall Country Park, east of Stoke, in 1974.

When Keith first arrived at Keele the magnificently laid park and gardens had been in decline since before World War Two. In 1939 the estate had been requisitioned by the War Office, and dozens of temporary buildings came to be erected to house troops. The new university college occupied the temporary buildings, "The Huts", as they were called, of which there were over a hundred.

Keith got to know the grounds at Keele extremely well. In 1975 his "A guide to the trees at Keele", was issued as an Occasional Publication by the University Library. He had by then been drafted to the grounds committee and became its chairman. In the late 1970s redevelopment of the temporary buildings was nearly complete, but attention to the campus landscape was overdue. After seeing "A PLAN of the intended improvements at KEEL the seat of Ralph Sneyd Esq by William Emes" in the University Library Keith wanted to find out more about Emes. His researches had identified about fifty attributions by 1980. Although Keith published the 'Landscapes and Gardens at Keele, 1700-1900' in 1982 it is much

to all garden historians' regret that he never turned his researches into a book on Emes' complete oeuvre.

In 1976 Keith became a member of the small ad hoc committee seeking to acquire a lease of the gardens at Biddulph Grange from the West Midlands Health Authority. Negotiations stalled until in 1981 Keith, by then a member of its Mercia Region Committee, introduced The National Trust to the site. This led ultimately to the Trust acquiring James Bateman's ornamental gardens in 1988, and restoring them before opening to the public in 1992.

During the 1980s Keith had an on-off entry into retirement but was much delighted that the two large and particularly ugly huts placed on the Italian gardens by Nesfield in the 1860s in front of Keele Hall were removed. Although there were not the funds to recreate that design Keith did install a heather garden which gave some of the same feel. This was unveiled at the 1986 GHS annual conference.

In 1984, at very short notice and with no clear guidance or precedence, Keith, Peter Hayden and Alan Taylor drafted a shortlist of twelve sites for the new English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens, notable both for its brevity and rigour. Keith was subsequently chairman of the steering committee of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust, which was formally established in 1992, and remained chairman for three years and on its council until 2007. Keith was Trustee of Castle Bromwich Hall Gardens from 1991 until 1993.

In 1991 Keith became Chairman of The Garden History Society's Conservation Panel and became GHS Chairman from 1995 until 1998. He was for ten years a member of English Heritage's Parks and Gardens Advisory Committee, an indication of the wide national respect in which he was held. Between 1998 and 2008 he was a trustee of Kelmars Hall, in Northamptonshire.

Keith moved to Stone in 1993. He joined the Stone Historical and Civic Society and indulged a range of interests. He was appointed a trustee of the William Salt Library and was a volunteer at the Wedgwood Museum. Keith took a prominent part in the appeal in 2012/13 to raise money to purchase the matrix from Stone Priory, used for making seals for the Priory's deeds.

Keith remained an interested member of SGPT, delivering a fascinating talk on Josiah Wedgwood's gardens at Etruria as the Christmas lecture in 2014. He was apparently in good health, and only the Saturday before his death had taken part in the Trust's visit to Fisherwick. It came as a shock that he died so suddenly. He was buried in the new woodland section of Stone Cemetery. Being the first in it, he got the prime spot, atop a small knoll appropriately overlooking the landscape of the Trent flood plain.

The Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust has received donations in Keith's memory totalling over £700, for which it is extremely grateful.

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*(Thanks to Nick Goodway and others for contributing material for this tribute)*

## STOP PRESS

At the Annual General Meeting of The Association of Gardens Trusts, held in Newcastle on July 24th, the merger with The Garden History Society was approved by 24 votes to 7, with one abstention. A press release regarding the subsequent formation of The Gardens Trust, including a new website, will be issued very soon.

The SGPT, together with the Shropshire, Hereford & Worcester and Warwickshire Trusts, all voted against the merger because of concerns over the business plan.

The SGPT's Council of Management will be discussing its response at its next meeting.

The Trust is pleased to announce that Elaine Artherton has agreed to take over the role of Membership Secretary. Elaine is Conservation Officer at a Midlands local authority.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Editor acknowledges with grateful thanks the contributions of Sarah Ashmead and Alan Taylor in the preparation of this Newsletter and of Gareth Williams, Curator at Weston Park, who very kindly provided the illustrations for the article on Fisherwick Park.