

# Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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# GREEN FLAG PARK AWARDS

**Most people have heard of the Blue Flag beach awards scheme which gives reassurance that a seaside beach is clean and safe to bathe from. By comparison, given that most of us only visit the seaside once a year, tend to live a long way from the coast and generally have a public park somewhere in our neighbourhood, relatively few people are aware of the Green Flag Park award scheme which will be celebrating its 20th anniversary next year. This is all the more surprising as getting on for 1400 parks (almost 10% of the total in the UK) now hold the award which aims to do for parks what Blue Flag does for beaches.**

The Green Flag Park Award scheme was set up in 1996 by the Pesticides Trust, The Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM) and English Nature against a background of declining local authority spending on public parks, compulsory competitive tendering driving down both prices and standards, and growing realisation of the value of parks to the well being of their local communities. The overall aim was to try and arrest the decline and drive up standards. The criteria for the award broadly reflected the interests and concerns of the founders: nature conservation and enhanced public access, good management, and reduction in the use of harmful chemicals or scarce natural resources (i.e. peat). These criteria have proved sound and still govern judging of the award today.

Parks have to demonstrate that they are safe for users; easy of access and well signposted for all ability groups; have good quality and appropriate amenities for different users (e.g. clean toilets, play equipment for children, adequate seating and shelter for visitors and possibly a café); are well maintained, free of dog fouling and litter. Parks also have to show good standards of horticulture and tree care (not dazzling displays of plantsmanship

but tidy and well kempt beds); a minimal (preferably zero) use of pesticides and peat; and have a promotional or marketing strategy that is appropriate to the site. Parks also have to show how they acknowledge and respect both the natural heritage of their site and any features of historic interest (both layout and historic structures). From the outset the scheme has recognised and encouraged community involvement both to secure a sense of local "ownership" and involvement in decisions affecting parks through the formation of "Friends" groups and also to create a nucleus of volunteers to help plug some of the gaps created by withdrawal of local authority funds and staff.

In the early days the scheme was administered by ILAM and funded (as it still is) by application fees. By 2000 the scheme had grown considerably and, recognising its value in driving up standards, overall sponsorship and ownership of the project was taken over by the government who currently licence its management and operation to the Keep Britain Tidy Group.

The scheme has grown considerably over the last 20 years. In the first year there were only 12 applications assessed by 16 judges nationally. Today there are



getting on for 1000 applications annually assessed by approximately 600 volunteer judges working in pairs. Applications are submitted each year between November and January with judging taking place between late March to early June. Applications are submitted in two parts: a management plan showing the rationale behind operation of the site and an accompanied site visit. Applications have to secure a pass, currently 66%, in both desktop and site visit to secure the award. Initially the award was held for 12 months but today to ease the burden on the scheme and applicants it is held for two years with a resubmission required in year three. To check standards haven't slipped between formal assessments parks may be subject to a mystery judge visit during the intermediate summer. The judging system

continued overleaf



Beacon Park, Lichfield. Green Flag Award holder 2015 which came 12th nationally in the People's Choice of favourite Green Flag park. Note the flag flying by the entrance

Tamworth whereas Stafford's two sites are almost as many for the whole of Shropshire (3).

Twenty years on there is no doubt that the scheme has been a huge success and has driven up both standards and our understanding of what constitutes a well run public park. Many parks managers have used the prestige of holding the flag to secure funding for improvement from their Councils even in cash strapped times. The Heritage Lottery Fund has been assisting public parks since the 1990s (now through its Parks for All programmes jointly with the Big Lottery). It is a condition that grant recipients hold the Green

is rigorous and as well as those that fail to make the grade on first submission others have been known to lose the award from one judging season to the next.

In the early days applications were generally received from "conventional" town parks but within a few years submissions were being received for (and awards given to) extensive country parks (like Baggeridge in South Staffordshire), and even for pocket parks the size of a town square (e.g. Queens Gardens, Newcastle). Today the scope of sites covered by the scheme is considerable including municipal cemeteries (e.g. Silverdale, Bradwell and Keele in Newcastle Borough) and some 6 university grounds across the country

(e.g. Nottingham Trent and Reading). Over time it has been realised that the standard criteria may not suit every site and new categories have been added to cover community gardens and historic parks (Green Heritage).

56 Staffordshire parks (including those in the Black Country covered by SGPT) hold the award in 2015-16. The best represented authorities are Sandwell and Newcastle under Lyme with 9 each followed by Stoke on Trent with 7, Walsall with 5 and East Staffordshire with 4. Strangely for a large urban authority with some very interesting parks Wolverhampton has none (Birmingham currently holds 16 awards); neither does

Flag for seven years to ensure the value of the lottery investment is safeguarded. And, if proof be needed of the value and achievement of the scheme, it has now been adopted in Germany, Holland, Australia, the USA and even Abu Dhabi and will surely continue to grow. Look out for the Green Flag flying by the gate of public parks next time you are out and about and you will be assured of a worthwhile visit.

For further information about the scheme and award holding parks visit [www.greenflagaward.org](http://www.greenflagaward.org).

A.T.

**Parks in Staffordshire and adjoining areas holding the award in 2015-16 (sites in *italics* were formerly in Worcestershire)**

**CANNOCK CHASE**

- Cannock Park
- Castle Ring
- Elmore Park
- Ravenhill Park
- Stile Cop Cemetery

**NEWCASTLE UNDER LYME**

- Bathpool Park
- Brampton Park
- Lyme Valley Park
- Queens Gardens
- Silverdale Park
- Bradwell Crematorium

**SOUTH STAFFORDSHIRE**

- Baggeridge Country Park
- Wom Brook Walk

**STAFFORD**

- Victoria Park
- Stafford Crematorium

**WALSALL**

- Blackwood Park
- Palfrey Park
- Willenhall Memorial Park
- Merrions Wood
- Rough Wood and Bentley Haye

**EAST STAFFORDSHIRE**

- Branston Water Park
- Kingfisher Trail
- Bramshall Road Park, Uttoxeter
- Stapenhill Gardens

**SANDWELL**

- Sandwell Valley Crematorium
- Barnford Park, Oldbury
- Dartmouth Park
- Haden Hill Park
- Sandwell Valley Park
- Victoria Park, Smethwick
- Brunswick Park, Wednesbury
- Tipton Cemetery
- Warley Woods

**STOKE UPON TRENT**

- Park Hall Country Park
- Burslem Park
- Fenton Park
- Queens Park, Longton
- Carmountside Cemetery
- Whitfield Valley LNR

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS**

- Ladderedge Country Park

**DUDLEY**

- Priory Park
- Huntingtree Park*
- Wollescote Park*
- Netherton Park*
- Silver Jubilee Park*
- The Leasowes*
- Wrens Nest NNR

**LICHFIELD**

- Beacon Park

# The Monks Walk Group



The Monks Walk Group have put down their tools for the time being and handed the responsibility for maintenance of the Monks Walk Garden to the new owners of the site - **Pegasus Life**. The photograph shows long standing members of the group (since 2003) with the new accommodation block called '**Chapter House**' in the background - built for Retirement Living and which commenced on site in September this year.

Planning obligations will ensure that the gardens are retained as part of the overall scheme. The Monks Walk Group will continue to work with Rob Hartley Landscapes who is contracted to maintain the garden until next year, when the site will be included in other landscaped areas for the use of residents.

We have been assured that The Monks Walk will remain open to the public into the future but currently the only access is from the lower end of the garden through the Lichfield University Campus car park.

Please feel free to visit this calm and peaceful space.

Some quotes from the individual members of the Monks Walk Group will tell you more about the unique character of the Monks Walk and the enjoyment of our voluntary work here over the past 12 years:

"An oasis of calm in the Friary Area of Lichfield. Great to work in the morning among the birds and the peace and quiet at the start of the day"

"A peaceful haven where I have learned so much about gardening from new friends"

"The Monks Walk has a special feeling about it ...the idea that people have been growing things in that space for centuries"

"An almost hidden garden, redolent of a quiet age with historic plants and herbs. A feeling of timelessness pervades the garden just before twilight. A special place"

"A beautiful garden created with like minded friends. A very enjoyable 10 years"

"A lovely peaceful space to escape to..."

"My memories are of a wonderful, calm sanctuary, birds singing, bees buzzing, while busy life went on outside"

# “A GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS”

**In early October, members visited Consall Hall Gardens, where they were given a short introductory talk by a member of staff before they set off on their own to explore the many delights the garden offered, some from a comfortable seat on the Garden’s buggy!**

Staffordshire owes this, one of its most picturesque gardens, to the creative imagination and energy of one man, William Podmore, OBE, who acquired ownership of Consall Hall in 1958.

His parents, William and Alberta Podmore, had bought the early nineteenth-century house in 1918. The garden next to the house had been planted between 1892 and 1915 in typical Victorian style, mainly with rhodendrons and Wellingtonias, but also with weeping ash and a blue cedar, but, while the house commanded a dominant view overlooking the landscape below, this view was masked by large pit banks, the legacy of more than a century of open-cast mining, an industry which had at its peak employed two thousand miners.

Recognising the potential of the natural topography, however – from the house the ground falls from 700 feet to 450 feet - , William Podmore set about reclaiming and enhancing its hidden beauty, a commitment which has already lasted more than fifty years and still continues to this day. In this endeavour he was supported in the crucial early years by his late wife, Edna May.

He brought to this task not only the eye of a true artist but the skills and experience of a mechanical engineer who had once worked on the first jet engines invented by Frank Whittle.

An early challenge in reclaiming the landscape was to remove four pit banks, one seventy feet high; and the amount of soil and shale removed – 250,000 tons - was used to build

ridges and construct dams for the six lakes which are now a prominent feature of the garden and afford havens for water fowl.

Four miles of walks at varying levels have been laid out over the seventy-acre site, interspersed with covered seats which allow the visitor to rest and enjoy the carefully-composed vistas and eye-catching follies. Trees were planted to provide shelter and allow visitors to the garden to enjoy the changing colours of the passing year – “a garden for all seasons”.

Most prominent amongst the follies is the ruined castle (officially known as the Pool Folly), which stands at the far end of Laund Pool (the pool nearest the house) and whose tower conceals an overflow built when the



The Castle Folly

Beyond the Landscaped Park



pool was altered. The castle, itself an eyecatcher from other parts of the garden, affords a view across the lake and back to the house.

In their book on Staffordshire's historic gardens†, Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre describe Consall Hall Landscape Garden as "eighteenth century Picturesque", and, while it is true that the gardens may well have drawn inspiration from eighteenth-century landscape design, they are by no means a slavish imitation; instead of a classical temple, for example, visitors will see an English country cottage, instead of a Palladian bridge a packhorse bridge. In addition, there is a grotto built from stone quarried on the site and a stone circle created out of gate posts and erected to draw visitors to a view-commanding eminence which they might otherwise pass by.

The very names of the various features – "William Sprink", "The Laund", "Dingle Pool", "Foxearth Tower", "Muggets Pool" – also give an indelible English character to the garden!

Another notable feature of the gardens is the use of reclaimed masonry brought from other locations: balustrading and stone brought from Otley Hall, in Cheshire, has been used to create the Fountain Terrace and main

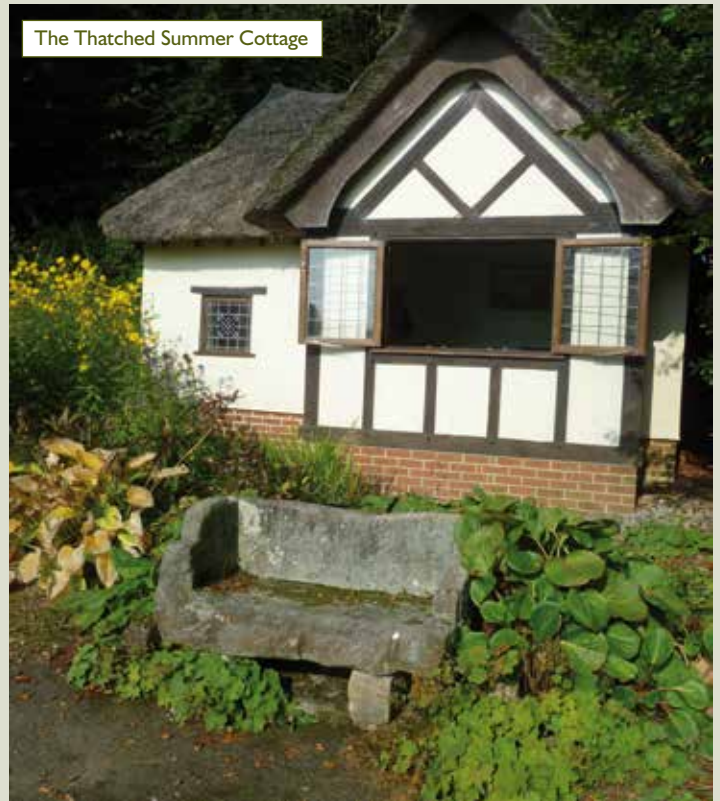
flight of steps which lead down into the gardens; the façade of Rousseau's Cave was brought from Wootton Hall, close to the Staffordshire-Derbyshire border, and a Jacobean porch from Oundle, in Northamptonshire, which now forms part of a folly in Ladypark, a raised terrace with formal flower beds at the south end of the Garden.

So that the view could be enjoyed from the house, the original entrance hall was moved from the south-west corner to the west, facing the valley, and the Georgian windows replaced with larger picture windows. In addition, the drive was re-positioned and the formal garden brought closer to the house (Internal alterations were also needed – when William and Edna May moved into the house, it had no fewer than five kitchens!).

An article of six or seven hundred words cannot possibly do credit to such a stunning creation and can convey little of the monumental effort which went into its development. For a true picture, members are urged to read William Podmore's own published account of how the garden was developed\*, better still, to book an early visit in 2016.

W.B.S.

The Thatched Summer Cottage



Laund Pool



Consall Hall



## Looking Ahead

This visit was the Trust's final visit of 2015, and planning for 2016 is already in hand. 2016 being the year in which the tercentenary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown is being celebrated, the programme will focus (though not exclusively) on visits to estates in Staffordshire where Brown worked.

† "The Historic Gardens of England: Staffordshire", published by Redcliffe Press in 2009.

\* "Consall Hall Landscape Garden: The Hidden Valley Revealed", published Landmark Publishing in 2004.

# "THE FARMHOUSE THAT SAVED A KING"

**Moseley Old Hall, which is situated at Fordhouses, four miles north of Wolverhampton, was built in about 1600 for Henry Pitt, when it was first known as "Mr. Pitt's new hall at Moseley". Henry Pitt, a wealthy merchant from nearby Bushbury, had purchased the estate in 1583. Upon his death, hall and estate were inherited by his daughter, Alice, who went on to marry Thomas Whitgreave, in whose family the hall and estate were to remain until 1925.**

In 1940, the Moseley estate was purchased by William Wiggin, of Bloxwich, whose family firm, J & J Wiggin, originally hardware manufacturers for the saddlery trade, went on to make the first stainless steel teapot. In 1962 the Wiggin family donated the Hall, by then emptied of its original furniture and paintings, to The National Trust, together with an acre of land. All the furniture and paintings now in the Hall, though of the period, has either been donated or lent, the exception being the four-poster bed on which Charles II slept during his flight from the battlefield at Worcester, where the Royalist army had been routed.

The bed had been purchased by Sir Geoffrey Mander and taken to Wightwick Manor, but, in 1962, his widow, Lady Mander, generously returned it to Moseley Old Hall.

The story of the King's escape was the stuff of romance! At more than six feet in height and of a swarthy complexion, he must have cut an impressive figure, even when dressed in threadbare woodman's clothes, his face smeared with mud, to be greeted by Thomas Whitgreave and Father John Huddleston, his chaplain and tutor to his three wards. (It was Father Huddleston who later received the dying King into the Catholic Church, and, an interesting footnote to local



Reliving the past at Moseley Old Hall



Moseley Old Hall (as Charles II did not know it!)



The Knot Garden & Vine Arbour

history, one of the three wards was Francis Palyn, and, yes, the actor and TV presenter Michael Palin is a direct descendant!).

The Whitgreave family were staunch Catholics and Royalists, William Whitgreave having fought with the King at the Battle of Naseby, where he had been wounded. They were risking their lives sheltering the fugitive King, on whose head a bounty of £1,000 had been

put, but such was the secrecy with which they surrounded the King's presence in the house that, when Commonwealth troops visited the house, forcing the King to hide in a priest-hole for two days, they were unable to bribe any servant to betray the King simply because none knew that he was there!

The King would not now recognise the building, since the original wooden-framed house was clad in brick

sometime in the 1870s, and the windows replaced, no doubt because it was felt that the Elizabethan style was no longer fashionable (though the original chimneys remain). However, the interior has little changed since the King sought refuge within its walls.

The Whitgreave family lived in the house until 1925, though the house had been abandoned as the family home in the 1820s, when the family moved into Moseley Court, a newly-built mansion now demolished. Moseley Old Hall became a farm-house, and when The National Trust acquired it in 1962 it was suffering from neglect. Since then, it has been fully restored and furnished with period furnishings.

The re-created seventeenth-century gardens do not replicate the gardens as they would have appeared at the time of the King's escapade, though he would have recognised the manner in which they had been laid out, as well as the plants, chosen for their historic authenticity.

Led by Gary, the head gardener, our tour began in the Front Garden, once a cobbled courtyard, but now laid down to lawns lined with low hedges of Wall Germander (widely used for edging lawns before the introduction of box) and punctuated by spirals and cones of box. Designed by Geoffrey Stuart-Thomas, the borders display a variety of old roses, as well as herbaceous plants and herbs such as soapwort, which was used for cleaning fabrics, and Cupid's Dart, used, as its name suggests, as a love potion!

From there we proceeded to the Knot Garden, which, we learnt, had been laid out to a 1630s design by the Rev. Walter Stonehouse, Rector of Darfield, in Yorkshire. The Knot Garden is laid out in a strictly geometrical pattern divided into a series of symmetrically-balanced beds each edged with a low-cut box hedge and filled, not with plants but with gravels of different colours and textures. Height is given to the design by standard clipped box trees standing within a number of circular beds.

Earlier knot garden design was inspired by needlework and, before the introduction of box, were laid out with wall germander, rosemary or lavender. An "open" knot garden allowed for strolling; "closed" knot gardens, which were closely planted, did not. To appreciate its full effect, a knot garden is, however, best viewed from above, that is to say, from the upper floor of the house

exclusive to the family.

Like Monty Don, Gary had experienced problems with box blight, which he is combating by trimming the box annually and feeding it every six weeks with liquid seaweed and chicken manure pellets all the year round.

The Knot Garden is flanked on one side by a wooden arbour and on another by the Nut Walk. The arbour, we were told, is based on a design from "The Gardener's Labyrinth", by Thomas Hill, written in 1577; it is covered in *vitis vinifera* "Purpurea", an ornamental vine whose leaves turn deep purple in the autumn and whose similarly-coloured but bitter-tasting grapes are best left on the plant to provide additional ornament to the display.

The Nut Walk, which was very much a feature of seventeenth-century garden design, is presently under restorative care; in time its top branches will be arched and it will be coppiced each year.

The Nut Walk led us into the Orchard, planted with varieties of historic fruit trees – pears such as the Black Country favourite, Tettenhall Dick, known since the early 18th century, whose small pears are "as hard as brick"; Black Worcester, which was known as far back as the fifteenth century, when the image of a fruit-laden tree appeared on the banner of the Bowmen of Worcestershire at the Battle of Agincourt, and now appears on the City of Worcester's coat of arms, it is said by command of Queen Elizabeth I; and apples such as London Pippin, a late-16th century dual purpose apple with a distinctive five-ribbed shape; and



Golden Harvey, known since 1600.

Soft fruit, including morella cherries, red and white currants, wild plums and damson, is also grown, and two bee skeps set into boles are a reminder of the importance of bees in the pollination of fruit trees. While they are no longer occupied, there are four working hives elsewhere in the grounds, and the honey produced is blended with other local honeys, to be sold as "Staffordshire Honey".

A newly-created herb garden replaces the garden to the manager's house, where, once again, heritage varieties are being grown. The garden, which replaces a grass lawn, is at an experimental stage while Gary establishes what will grow there.

All this work is carried out by a team of





The Vine Arbour

eighteen part-time volunteers, under Gary's direction. Gary, who has been at Moseley Old Hall only two and a half years, is the only full-time professional gardener employed by The Trust; previously, the work had been carried out by contractors, who had little interest in the history of the garden.

Asked whether the history of the garden was being explored, Gary said that research was hampered by lack of information; in any case, as SGPT members who visited Croome Court last year discovered, stripping back a

property or garden to what would be seen as its heyday was not without its problems. At what stage does a later addition become part of its history? At Moseley Old Hall, the original cobbled courtyard at the front of the house which Charles II would have looked down on was replaced nearly sixty years ago by a garden designed by Geoffrey Stuart-Thomas, now seen as a widely-respected authority on ancient roses.

After a break for refreshments, the party re-assembled at the entrance to the house, known as the King's Door, to be greeted by Pat, suitably attired in period costume, a feature of all the house guides. The tour began in the kitchen, where we were given a brief history of the house before being taken round its rooms, including the King's Bedroom and the Hiding Place, a priest's hole where the King spent two days. The party was invited to imagine how uncomfortable it must have been for the King, who was over six feet in height, to fit himself into a space 4ft 6 in by 5ft, and only 4ft high!

Already impressed by the knowledge and expertise shown by Gary, the party was to be equally impressed by the encyclopaedic knowledge which Pat shared with us. Nor was it restricted to

the furnishings and other artefacts on show; she had clearly immersed herself in the social and cultural practices of the time, and showed us how the beliefs, strictures and sayings of an earlier age had become embedded through everyday sayings in our own times. Expressions like "chairman of the board", "upper crust" and "square meal" emanate from the dining-room (naturally!), "sleep tight" from the bedroom (but do you know why?). Similarly, "don't throw the baby out with the bathwater" emanated from the practice of the entire family using the same bathwater in order of their age and status because (do you think?), at the end, the water was so blackened by dirt that a small infant could be overlooked by a careless nurse!

It was the unanimous opinion of the party that it had been a memorable afternoon, and, while both Hall and Garden were open for individuals and families to visit on their own initiative, it was recognised that it was a considerable advantage to be part of an organised party guided by individuals with a considerable knowledge of house or garden which they are happy to share.

W.B.S

## PLANT HUNTERS' FAIRS IN 2016

Planters' Fairs give members the opportunity to purchase unusual plants from specialist growers which will give their gardens that something extra. In 2016 there will be Fairs at the following locations in Staffordshire:

**The National Memorial Arboretum,**  
Alrewas (DE13 7AR)

- Saturday, 2nd April; Saturday, 28th May; Saturday, 6th August, from 10.00 a.m. till 4.30 p.m.
- Entry to Arboretum and Plant Fair free, but parking charge applies.

**Consall Hall Landscape Gardens,**  
Wetley Rocks (ST9 0AG)

- Sunday, April 17th, from 10.00 a.m. till 5.00 p.m.
- Entry to Gardens and Plant Fair £2.00.

**Shugnall Hall Walled Garden,**  
near Stafford (ST21 6NF)

- Saturday, 23rd April; Sunday, 3rd July,

from 11.00 a.m. till 4.00 p.m.

- Entry to Plant Fair and Lakeside Walks free.

**Middleton Hall, near Tamworth (B78 2AE)**

- Sunday, 22nd May, from 10.00 a.m. till 5.00 p.m.
- Entry to Hall, Gardens and Plant Fair £2.00.

**There will also be Fairs at the following locations in Shropshire:**

**The Dorothy Clive Garden,**  
near Market Drayton (TF9 4EU)

- Easter Sunday, 27th March; Easter Monday, 28th March;
- Sunday, 28th August; Bank Holiday Monday,

29th August, from 10.00 a.m. till 5.00 p.m.

- Entry to Gardens and Plant Fair £3.50.

**Weston Park, near Shifnal (TF11 8LE)**

- Sunday, 1st May; Monday, 2nd May, from 10.00 till 5.00 p.m.
- Entry to Gardens and Plant Fair £3.00
- Sunday, 11th September, from 10.00 a.m. till 4.00p.m.
- Entry to Gardens and Plant Fair £2.50.

**Hodnet Hall, Market Drayton (TF9 3NN)**

- Saturday, 4th June; Sunday, 5th June, from 10.00 a.m. till 5.00 p.m.
- Entry to Gardens and Fair £3.50.

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\* from 1st January 2016

Visit the Trust's website [www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org](http://www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org) for information about the aims of the Trust, its activities and its publications, including past issues of the Newsletter.