

Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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News LETTER

A Visit to Himley Hall

This year's programme of visits began at Himley Hall, a Brownian landscape park on the edge of Dudley. The tour of the parkland was led by our Chairman, Alan Taylor, who first gave the assembled party an introductory talk on the history of the estate. This was the first visit in our 2016 programme arranged to illustrate to members the rich inheritance of Brownian landscapes which Staffordshire is able to offer.

There was a deer park at Himley in medieval times occupying a moated site slightly to the south-west of the present hall and moated gardens. This was demolished in the mid eighteenth century, when the first Viscount Dudley began a programme of improvements to the estate and built a new house which forms the core of the present house.

Three designers were involved in the development of the estate: Nathaniel Richmond worked there between 1740 and 1774, 'Capability' Brown between 1774 and 1783, and William Atkinson from 1823 till 1833. It is thought that William Emes

may also have been involved, but, to date, no documentary evidence has emerged which would establish the extent of his involvement.

In his own lifetime, Nathaniel Richmond was held in high regard as a "landscape improver", none other than Humphry Repton asserting that he was the equal of William Kent and 'Capability' Brown, for whom he had sometime worked. A Scot, William Atkinson is best known for designing and re-modelling country houses in the later Gothic style. His most notable work is probably Scone Palace, the home of the romantic novelist, Sir Walter Scott, at

Abbotsford. He is also known for inventing 'Atkinson's cement', which could be used both externally and internally as a stucco and for mouldings.

Richmond was commissioned to lay out a landscape fit for the new hall which he had just built, and the architect's response was to create a park in the grounds to the north of the house which included a winding, river-like watercourse and a circular walk over a tree-clad hill known (somewhat unimaginatively) as "The Hill".

Upon inheriting the estate in 1773, the second Viscount called in Brown, who extended the park in a southerly direction. He relocated the main Dudley road, displacing Himley village in the process. In a characteristic design he remodelled Richmond's river to create a lake (now the home of the Himley Hall Sailing Club), laid down a ha-ha at the front of the house, planted a belt of trees around the estate and clumps of trees throughout the park. Forty years later, the fourth Viscount commissioned William Atkinson to re-design and re-model the Hall. A follower of Payne Knight and Uvedale Price, founders of the Picturesque Movement, Atkinson added a number of romantic features to the park, including a Gothic bridge and a series of cascades.

Himley Hall had been the principal home of the Ward family (at different times Baron, Viscount and Earl of Dudley) since the seventeenth century following the



Himley Hall

continued overleaf

'sighting' of their ancestral home, Dudley Castle, at the end of the English Civil Wars, but, in spite of these improvements, the family soon afterwards moved to Witley Court, in Worcestershire, when the smoke, noise and fumes from a nearby ironworks made Himley Hall unattractive (even though mineral royalties and mining leases had made the Earl of Dudley one of the wealthiest peers in the land!). Himley Hall then became the residence of the Viscount's mother, the Dowager Lady Dudley, who added formal flower gardens around the house.

After the sale of Witley Court in 1920, however, the family returned to Himley, which became the home of Viscount Ednam, second son of the Earl. He laid out terraces to the west and south of the house, while Lady Ednam laid out herbaceous borders along the front. In the following years, the Hall and grounds became the centre of much social activity, hosting both charitable fetes and visits from royalty, including the then Prince of Wales, later the Duke of Windsor (accompanied by Mrs. Simpson). During World War Two, part of the house was used as a hospital by the Red Cross, and some of the parkland was ploughed up to grow crops.

A fall in income from land rents and the introduction of death duties led to a decline in the fortunes of the family, and, in 1947, the Hall was sold to the National Coal Board, who wished to use it as its regional headquarters. Most of the surrounding estate, including eight farms, was also sold off, and, by 1963, the family had virtually severed all connections with Himley. During work on the house in April 1947, a fire gutted the upper floor of the south wing, while water used to extinguish the flames severely damaged the floor below, and in the consequent restoration much of the original features were lost.

In turn, as the result of the decline in the mining industry, the Hall and estate were put up for sale and in 1967 were jointly purchased by the Dudley and Wolverhampton Councils. Subsequently, Dudley Council negotiated sole ownership of the Hall and grounds, which are now run as a country park.

We were set off on a circular tour which took in the main features of the park. Skirting the neighbouring Himley Golf Course and Baggeridge Country Park, both of which were once part of the estate, we passed Rock Pool before pausing in front of the Grotto and the Ice House, both sealed off from public access for safety reasons. There then followed the most challenging part of the walk, a climb up The Hill, steep of ascent and slippery under foot following recent rain, where we saw many trees which had survived from the eighteenth century plantings. Finally, we skirted The Pool and headed back for richly-earned refreshment.

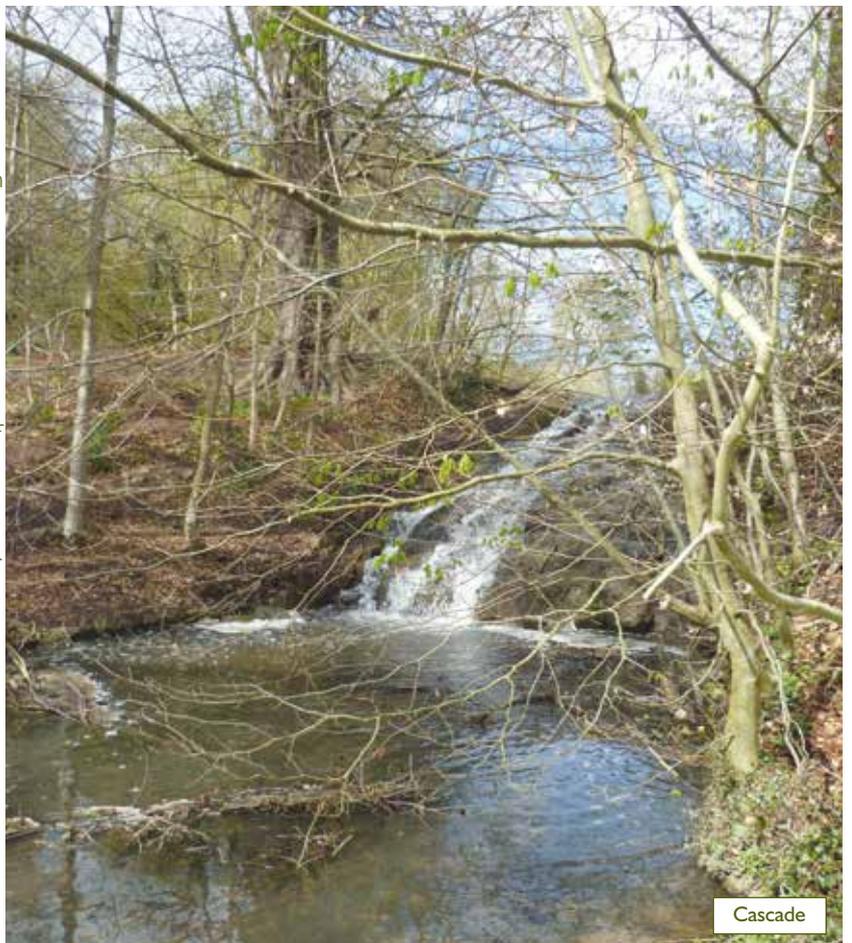
(Sources consulted in the preparation of this article included "Himley Hall & Park: A History", by David F. Radmore, published by Dudley Libraries, 1996, and "Himley Hall Park"- Restoration Proposals prepared by Colston Stone Partnership in support of a Heritage Lottery Fund Application, dated November 1997)



The Lake



The Gothic Bridge



Cascade

The Garden Party

Nearly fifty members and their friends attended the Trust's Garden Party, held at Sugnall Hall at the end of June. Light but persistent rain forced the event indoors, though the more intrepid ventured into the gardens under the shelter of umbrellas.

2016 being the tercentenary of the birth of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the main item of the afternoon was a light-hearted debate on whether 'Capability' Brown was a visionary or a vandal. Assuming the persona of Brown, our host, David Jacques, began by pointing out that he was, beyond challenge, the most famous gardener this country has ever produced, having carried out two hundred and fifty commissions and been the subject of six modern biographies.

Born in humble circumstances in Northumberland, he had moved south to become head gardener at Stowe before setting up in practice on his own. Quite a few of his earlier commissions were in Warwickshire and Staffordshire, and his career had reached its peak when the King appointed him Head Gardener at Hampton Court. It is true that he had been attacked by Sir William Chambers, an architect contemporary best known for his Chinese pagoda at Kew Gardens, who had referred scathingly to "peasants emerging from the milling grounds", but his clients had included nearly all His Majesty's ministers as well as most lords of the realm (and even a few baronets) and, while he had died nearly 250 years ago, his fame lives on.

Peter Goodchild, who had been given only ten minutes' notice to put the case for Richard Payne Knight on the opposite side of the debate, rose magnificently to the occasion (though he did admit at the end that, really, he was an admirer of Brown!). Payne Knight, a wealthy Herefordshire landowner born in 1750, when Brown was setting out on his own, was a vociferous critic of the Brownian style. He saw nature as essentially rough, broken and wild, mocking Brown's smooth and elegant designs in an essay entitled "The Landscape". Peter drew a distinction between what he called "the elegant landscape", which he thought described Brown's style, and "the rustic picturesque", the style championed by Payne Knight and his friend, Uvedale Price, baronet and nearby landowner. Had the pair been alive today, they might have been described as "ecologists", as opposed to "gardeners", as their kind of "picturesque"

became synonymous with "rustic" characterised by ruined castles and rocky ravines.

In the lively discussion which followed, "The Ghost of Gardeners Present" (whose identity will be revealed at a Trust event this autumn) suggested that the modern equivalent of the eighteenth-century fashion for Brown's lawns was the widespread fashion for decking! Another speaker went so far as to query if Brown, having discovered a style which was popular, peddled it around the country because it was lucrative; another asked whether he had got bored of all the sameness towards the end of his life like the great French garden designer, André le Nôtre.

Our Brown impersonator said that, on the contrary, his style developed, and he took great satisfaction from his later commissions. There were examples, as at nearby Ingestre, where he had kept some of the more formal elements of an earlier layout. He was obliged to keep his client's own views into account and would modify his plans accordingly. No formal garden could have been removed without its owner's consent. It was not without reason that he had acquired the nickname "Capability". He assessed all estates he had been invited to visit for their "capabilities"; he did not impose a standard template on the landscape.

After the entertainment of the debate, the discussion continued over a sumptuous tea including cakes made to an 18th century recipe with which Brown might have been familiar, as those present tried to make up their minds whether Brown was a Visionary



Left to Right:
Joe Hawkins; David Jacques; David Baker; Peter Goodchild; Alan Taylor.

or a Vandal.

The Trust is most grateful to David Jacques for making the Hall available as the venue, to Michael Faarup, who had first proposed and then undertaken the organisation of the event, and to Joyce Sullivan for baking the 18th century cakes.

A note on Sugnall Hall

The Sugnall estate originally belonged to the Pershall family, who had built the Old Hall on a site adjacent to the present Walled Garden on the other side of the Eccleshall Road. It passed into the ownership of Lord Glenorchy when he married the family heiress in 1730. Glenorchy was influenced by the writing of Stephen Switzer and laid out a ferme ornée which predates that at Wooburn in Buckinghamshire, generally considered the first of its kind. The Old Hall was demolished in the later 18th century, only the kitchen wing remaining, and the present hall built on the new site. Mid 19th century plans for a new Hall, which, according to David Jacques, would have borne a striking resemblance to St. Pancras Station had it been built, were abandoned for lack of funds and, instead, two wings were added to the eighteenth-century house.

“One of the finest pieces of water

The Trust’s third visit was to Chillington Hall, another historic estate in Staffordshire where ‘Capability’ Brown worked.

Chillington Hall has been in continuous ownership of the Giffard family since 1178 and is now the home of the 29th generation of the family.

The family from whom the Giffards are descended came from Normandy and for generations were ardent Roman Catholics, for which, in Tudor times, they paid a heavy price. Together with their neighbours, the Pendrells, they played a crucial role in the escape of Charles II through Staffordshire after his defeat at Worcester in 1651, and, to this day, are Trustees administering the pensions granted to the Pendrell family, the Giffards’ neighbours and tenants, by Charles upon his return to England.

The present house is the third built on the site. The original Norman stone castle was replaced in the mid sixteenth century by a Tudor hall. In 1724 Francis Smith of Warwick partly demolished the existing hall and replaced it with the red-brick Palladian south front which still exists today. Then, in 1785, Sir John Soane demolished what remained of the Tudor hall, extending and re-modelling the house, when he added the magnificent central saloon (Earlier, Robert Adam had drawn up plans for a new house, but these were never implemented).

Fortunately, the Hall was not requisitioned during the Second World War, probably because there was at that time no guaranteed supply of water, and, as a result, escaped the ravages which many requisitioned house suffered.

In about 1760, ‘Capability’ Brown had been commissioned to landscape the park. Until recently, the only evidence that Brown had ever worked at Chillington was a note by James Paine attached to a drawing of his bridge which referred to the lake as being by Brown.

But the discovery of an accounts book recording payment by Brown to wheelwrights and blacksmiths which undoubtedly referred to the maintenance of vehicles used for removing the soil from the excavations related to the digging out of the lake was an unequivocal confirmation of his presence at Chillington.



The Roman Temple

However, no plans had survived, and it was feared that they may have been destroyed in a fire at Wrottesley Hall in 1902, where they had been temporarily removed.

Brown created the lake out of three small ponds by building a forty-foot earth dam. Probably Brown’s largest lake, seventy acres in area (and known as “The Pool”), it was described by James Paine as “one of the finest pieces of water, within an enclosure, that this Kingdom possesses”.

Not surprisingly, it was used by the family for boating, and the remains of a boat-house can be seen in the grounds.

The park contains a number of striking architectural features: the Grecian Temple, possibly built by Robert Adam, a bridge by Paine, the ruins of a Gothic temple, possibly by Robert Woods and sadly destroyed by a falling tree, and the five-arched Sham Bridge - so-called because no water flows through its arches - , which disguises another small dam built by Brown to create the lake.

In the distance, built as an eye-catcher; is the Whitehouse, whose

white-washed façade conceals a working farmhouse. It is now separated from the park by the M54, which cuts through the estate, though a soil mound masks the motorway, and the view from the park across to the house appears unbroken.

Today, 1100 acres of the parkland are designated as a Conservation Area, and over the last thirty years over 250,000 trees have been planted. It should be noted, however, that the impressive avenue of trees which once formed the original approach to the house pre-dates Brown by more than thirty years.

On the west side of the house is another striking feature – the Bowling Green Arch,



The Grecian Temple

er...that this Kingdom possesses”



Brown's Canal



Paine's Bridge

a large brick and stone screen dating from 1730 which frames an archway leading into a lawn which was once a bowling green. Its fine gates are believed to be by Robert Bakewell of Derby. A Staffordshire man born in Uttoxeter in 1682, Bakewell created many magnificent wrought-iron gates and screens which are to be found in a number of Derbyshire churches, as well as the arbour known as “The Birdcage” at Melbourne Hall which some of our members will have seen when the Trust visited Melbourne Hall in 2013.

The walk round the Park, which in its entirety covers approximately four miles, was preceded by a tour of some of the rooms of the house, which began in the magnificent saloon which occupies the site of the hall of the Tudor house and is dominated by the great glass dome.

The tour encompassed the fine Georgian staircase; the Dining Room, hung with family portraits by Pompeo Battoni, the eighteenth-century Italian painter noted for his portraits of English nobility travelling through Italy on the Grand Tour; the Drawing Room, with furniture by Robert Gillow, the eighteenth-century furniture-maker who provided furniture and furnishings of an exceptionally fine quality for the country's wealthiest families; and the Morning Room, part of Francis Smith's extension in 1724, but enlarged in 1911.

A striking feature in the Drawing Room is a large mirror over the fireplace, in the centre of whose frame is a panther's head, recalling a memorable incident in the family's history when, in 1513, Sir John Giffard shot dead a panther with a bow and arrow after the beast had escaped from Sir John's menagerie and was about to attack a mother and child.

Once thought a fiction invented by the Victorians, its reality has been put beyond dispute by the discovery that the Giffard family were in the same year granted a crest depicting a panther's head and further reinforced when a second crest

was granted ten years later depicting an archer with bow and arrow in hand and a quiver at his side.

Throughout the visit, members were privileged to be accompanied by Chillington's owner, John Giffard, whose love of his inheritance was transparent, though the weight of responsibility which such an inheritance brings with it should not be overlooked.

The Trust is most grateful to John for his generosity in giving up his time to host this visit and to ensure that it was a memorable experience for all those who took part.



The Boathouse

Visiting Henbury Hall

For its second visit of the year, the Trust ventured into neighbouring Cheshire, to visit Henbury Hall, the home of the de Ferranti Family just outside Macclesfield.

A house was recorded at Henbury in the Domesday Book. In 1649 the house occupying the site was described as “very sumptuous”, with a deer park, fishponds, orchards and hopyards, but, in 1742, this was replaced by a classical -style hall which was drastically reduced in size in the 1850s.

It is thought that Humphry Repton may have worked on the estate in the 1800s, but no documentary evidence has so far emerged which would give substance to this belief.

In 1874 the estate was bought

by Thomas Brocklehurst, a great traveller, who brought back plants from the Far East, including the older rhododendrons from China which are the core of the present collection. He also brought back a pair of grey squirrels from North America – and the rest, as they say, is history!

Standing close to the walled garden is a unique temple bell, cast in 1700, which Brocklehurst brought back from Tokyo in 1880.

In 1957 the estate was bought by Sir Vincent de Ferranti, the son of Sebastian Ziani de Ferranti, founder of the electrical

engineering firm. Sir Vincent’s son, also named Sebastian, replaced the Georgian hall with the present house, completed in 1986. Built in the style of Andrea Palladio’s Villa Rotondo near Vicenza, it reflects the family’s Venetian roots.

Led by Sean Barton, the Head Gardener, the party, which included members of the Cheshire Gardens Trust, made a leisurely progress around the extensive gardens. These have been undergoing extensive restoration following years of neglect under previous ownership. Sean explained that, during that time, the focus had been on clearance



Henbury Hall

and only now had the point been reached when he felt he could embark on a programme of structured planting which would enhance the many fine specimens of rare rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias which are the outstanding feature of the gardens.

The gardens take advantage of an undulating landscape and are dominated by a magnificent lake, one of two, which is crossed by a Chinese bridge and beside which still stands an early nineteenth-century ice-house.

A rare Ram Pump, which pumps water to the house from a nearby spring, is crowned by a Gothic folly which provides a perfect viewing platform across the lake to the sloping ground beyond.

On the edge of the formal grounds lies a walled garden, which features glasshouses by Foster & Pearson, the noted Victorian manufacturers. These were built about 1874 and have recently been restored. They now house a collection of exotics including a large group of Pamiante Peruviana (otherwise known as the Peruvian daffodil) and an Amaryllid which no longer exists in the wild.

Here, the party lingered, there being much to study and admire – and an opportunity to quiz Sean

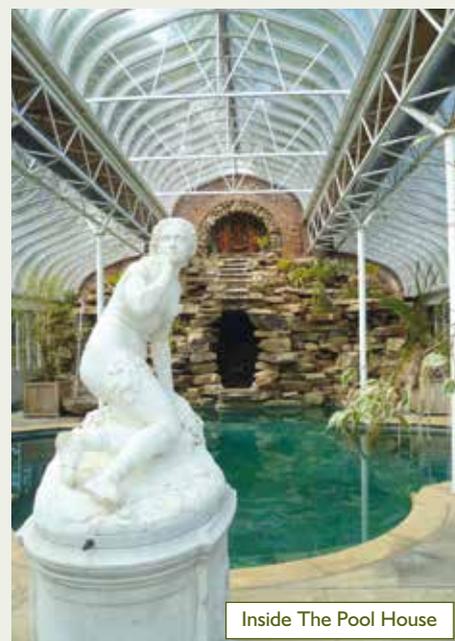


The Gothic Folly
(Which conceals the pump house inside which is a rare Ram Pump)

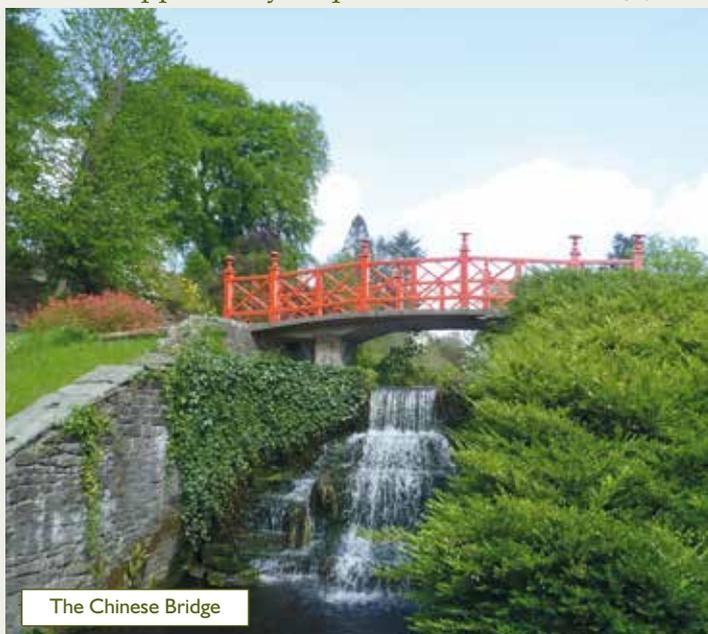
on a range of horticultural topics!

Close by the walled garden is the ornate modern Pool House (recreational, not ornamental, though exotics line the pool), at one end of which is a cascade.

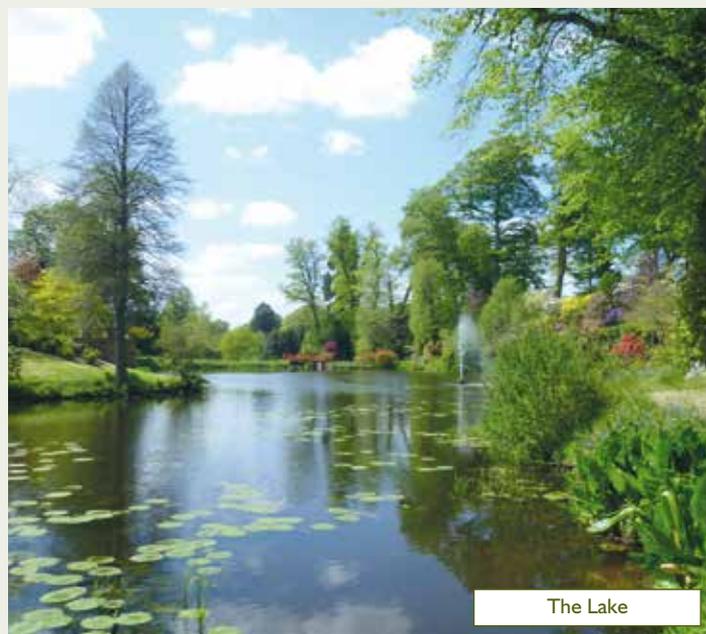
The day was fine, dry and sunny, the slopes gentle, the pace measured, the views enthralling, our guide enthusiastic and authoritative. The afternoon finished with tea in the courtyard under the late afternoon sun. Clearly, a return visit in two or three years' time, when the fruits of Sean's labours will become increasingly evident, is indicated!



Inside The Pool House



The Chinese Bridge



The Lake

TITHE MAPS

Tithe maps are essential for any serious study of landscape history, as they often represent the earliest full and accurate survey of a parish or township. The main collection of Staffordshire Tithe maps are held, with the Tithe Awards. In the Lichfield Joint Record Office, where they can be viewed, usually by appointment, as many are so large that they take up more than the space allocated to four readers. There are some in the Staffordshire Record Office and the William Salt Library, but by no means a complete set, and there are also the copies held in the National Archives.

To make these maps more accessible, The Friends of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archives are appealing for funds to digitise the Lichfield collection of tithe maps. There are 256 maps in all, and the cost of digitisation, at high resolution, is estimated at £18,000. So far, £13,000 has been raised, so there is still opportunity to sponsor the digitisation of a specific map. The tithe awards have all been transcribed by a team of volunteers working on the project for seven years, and the full transcription will be made available on line shortly. When digitised, the maps will be available free

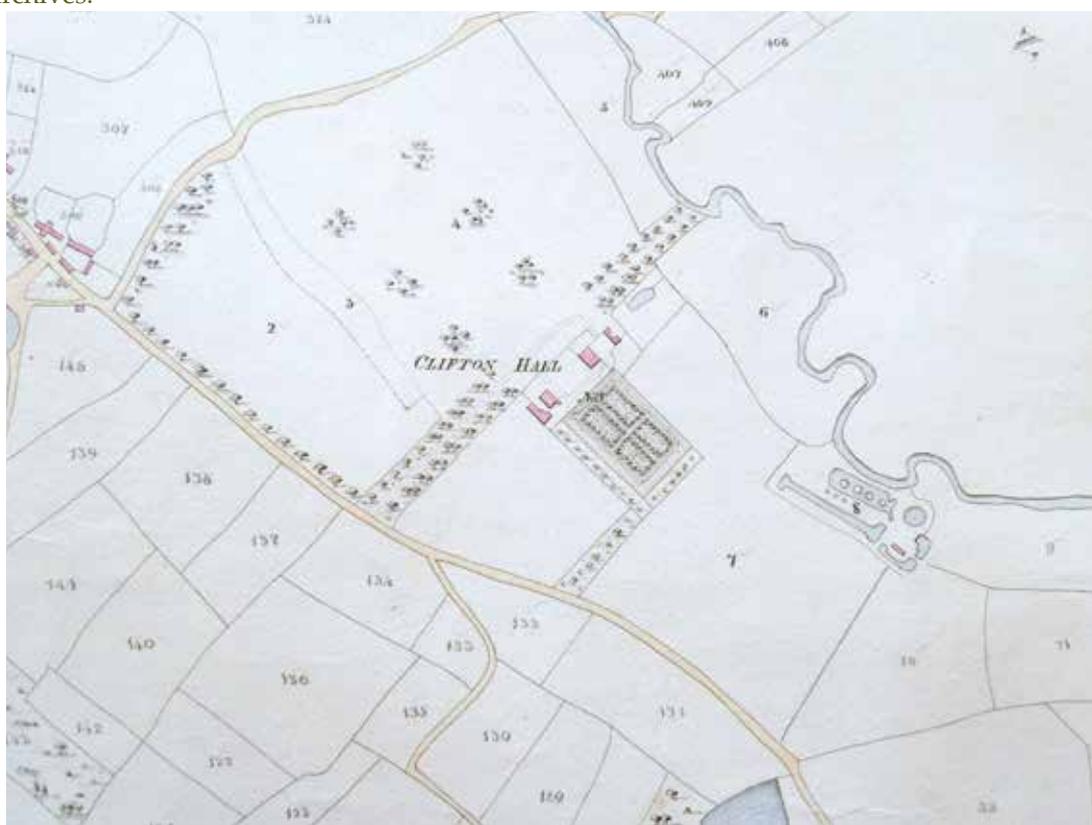
of charge at the Staffordshire Archives search rooms and at local libraries. Copies will be made available to bodies who have purchased individual maps; copies on CD will also be available for purchase.

Here as an example is part of the tithe map of Clifton Campville showing the grounds of Clifton Hall, recently brought to our attention by Dianne Barre. The map of Clifton Campville is available for sponsorship, and a full list of maps will be found on the project website:-

<https://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/getinvolved/friends/TitheMapProject.aspx>

The website lists the maps and the amount needed for the digitisation of each map, which varies from £40 for the smallest to £120 for the very few large maps.

Richard Totty
FoSSA



STOP PRESS

On 16th August, Royal Mail are issuing a set of stamps entitled: "Landscape Gardens: The Genius of Lancelot 'Capability' Brown". The gardens illustrated are Blenheim Palace; Longleat; Alnwick Castle; Berrington Hall; Compton Verney; Highclere Castle; Stowe; and Croome Court.

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