

# Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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# News LETTER

## The Year of Brown “Like entering Narnia without the Snow!”

**In September, the Trust visited Trentham Gardens, which had served as one of CB300's Regional Hubs, and where, with Alan Taylor, the Trust's Chairman, one of our number, we were taken on a tour of the garden and park by Michael Walker, Head of Garden and Estate.**

Michael recalled that Brown had received three commissions between 1759 and 1780, visiting Trentham on a number of occasions. He swept away the formality of earlier designs, retaining only one foot of the existing patte d'oeil, or goose foot, a beech avenue planted between 1690 and 1710.

Brown had also naturalised the appearance of the lake which had earlier replaced the long canal in front of the house and replaced the formal front garden with a lawn and shrubbery. He also carried out extensive woodland planting.

However, the garden has lots of layers, of which Brown's was only one, though by far the most significant. Previously, major works had been carried out by the Rev. George Plaxton, who, between 1685 and 1700, managed to combine the rôle of Chief Agent at Trentham with that of Rector of Donnington, in Berkshire. He had been followed by a succession of notable landscape designers - Charles Bridgeman, William Sawrey Gilpin, William Nessfield and finally by Charles Barry

Brown's lake, sixty acres in size, which

Brown created by diverting the River Trent, continues to dominate the landscape (later, George Fleming, the mid-Victorian Head Gardener noted for his innovative planting schemes, once again diverted the river so that it now ran parallel to the lake, hoping perhaps to prevent the industrial sewage which was beginning to pollute the water from entering the lake).

However, Brown's lawn and shrubbery were swept away when in 1833 Charles Barry, designer of the Houses of Parliament, was commissioned to re-build the house in the Italianate style. At the same time he laid out the front garden in similar Italianate style, with terraces and parterres.

The house itself had been re-modelled on a number of occasions, notably by Smith of Warwick in 1712 and again by Brown and his son-in-law Henry Holland in 1760. But, following the departure of the family as a consequence of industrial pollution, the house was demolished in 1911 after both Staffordshire County Council and Stoke City Council had rejected a suggestion that one or other might acquire it as a university campus. Fragments of the house survive at Lilleshall Hall, a secondary family home, Sandon Hall and a Derbyshire church.

After suffering decades of neglect, the estate was bought in 1979 by the  
**continued overleaf**



Trentham Gardens  
Formal Garden



Trentham Gardens  
Our Chairman photographing  
the boat house foundations!

entrepreneur John Bloom, best known for his part in 'The Washing-Machine Wars', in which he undercut the major manufacturers by selling directly to customers. Bloom set about creating a recreation park, thereby continuing the long tradition of being open to the public when workers from the Potteries travelled to the Garden down the canal in barges.

Bloom introduced water-skiing and a chairlift and hosted the Lombard RAC motor rally, but when he failed to get planning permission for further development he sold the estate in 1984 to the National Coal Board, whose mining activities caused the lake to empty when it drained into a disused shaft

which ran beneath it!

Trentham continued as a pleasure park providing leisure amenities for the Potteries, including a ballroom and a lido (it also acted as an unofficial dating agency, bringing together innumerable couples who went on to get married!).

In 1996 it was bought by St. Modwen Properties, who have embarked on a lengthy programme of restoration. The part of Barry's formal garden nearest the house has been faithfully replicated, but further from the house the beds have been laid out in a more modern style of planting by Piet Oudolf and Tom Stuart-Smith.

At the same time, the long tradition of public access is being continued, creative work being introduced into the grounds and interpretation boards being erected at intervals to enhance public understanding of Trentham's history and later development.

By 2011 much of Brown's landscape had been overplanted with commercial forestry and overrun with invasive rhododendron ponticum. Extensive felling and woodland clearance and the creation of a sequence of meadows had softened the landscape and re-established the earlier connection between landscape, lake and house, though, of the latter, only the picture gallery and church remain. Indeed, the demolition of the house had removed a strong visual stop, and St. Modwen's was looking for a solution to the problem this has caused.

Intrusive trees and shrubs in Brown's woodlands have been removed to reveal their original layout, and, on completion of the restoration programme, 200,000 native trees will have been planted.

Sadly, however, imported diseases are attacking some of our best-loved trees such as oak, ash, elm and horse chestnut, and this makes it impossible to re-create exactly past landscapes. Moreover, since Brown's time, many exotics have become firmly established in the landscape designer's catalogue. In addition, climate change has meant that more drought-resistant trees needed to be planted to ensure a landscape robust enough to last another three hundred years.

Cleared areas have been temporarily planted with a mixture of meadow seeds while a decision is made as to their future development, while other areas have been planted with bulbs such as anemones, daffodils and white iris, the aim being to make these areas look as naturalistic as possible.

Hundreds of magnolias will be introduced, planted in clumps of twenty, thirty and fifty.

Management of the lake, which is currently being used by a water sports association, is also providing a challenge, and keeping it clear of aquatic weed is a continuous and expensive exercise. That it had been regarded by the family not just as a picturesque feature but as a



Trentham Gardens  
Meadow Planting

recreational facility as well is confirmed by the uncovering of the foundations of an eighteenth-century boathouse that predated Brown.

Another recent discovery has been an earlier ice-house which also pre-dates Brown; thought to have been crowned by a thatched conical dome, it was surrounded in the 1850s with a wall of blue engineering bricks, possibly to improve insulation. It fell out of use when it was replaced in mid-Victorian times by another ice-house built nearer the house.

Public interest in the Gardens is being generated through the Trentham Shopping Village, which has become one of the Potteries' major draws, attracting an annual footfall of more than three million, which, in turn, results in between 550,000 and 600,000 visitors to the Garden. Describing the relationship between Shopping Village and Garden as "symbiotic", Michael likened entering the tranquillity of the Garden through the bustle of the Shopping Village to entering Narnia "without the snow"!

Thanking Michael at the conclusion of the tour, Alan, who, in his professional role, had been involved at Trentham since 1980, described watching the estate's fortunes, which had nose-dived under the National Coal Board, revive under St. Modwen's ownership as one of the most encouraging features of his career; in turn, Michael expressed his appreciation of the support which Alan had given him in the thirteen years he had been at Trentham, recalling, tongue in cheek, that Alan had once been described in "Country Life" as "the godfather of Trentham"!

***"The gardens are a good example of an 18th century landscape park where Capability Brown once worked"***  
**– Great British Gardens**

In October, the Trust visited **Weston Park**, formerly the home of the Earls of Bradford but now owned and managed by the Weston Park Foundation, where members were taken on a tour of the grounds by Martin Gee, the Head Gardener.

Here, in 1756, Brown was commissioned

to convert a formal landscape to a more naturalistic style, which he did in characteristic manner; planting woodlands and belts and clumps of trees and creating a three-acre lake. At the same time he opened up the view from the house to the distant Clee Hills, separating the grounds closest to the house from the park by an eight-foot deep ha-ha.

To enter the parkland, the visitor originally passed through a tunnel under the driveway from the formality of the grounds closest to the house into the more relaxed environment of the landscape, in its way providing as dramatic a contrast as that experienced at Trentham.

Then, in 1770, James Paine was commissioned to make alterations to the house. In addition, he designed the Temple of Diana, which serves both as an eyecatcher and a vantage point from which to view the thousand-acre parkland.

The Temple of Diana was designed so as to combine the functions of



Weston Park  
The Victorian Garden

Weston Park  
Picking our way through  
Lady Ann's Garden



conservatory (where camellias were grown), music room and dairy with resident milkmaid. It was named after the Greek Goddess of Hunting, which was one of the Earl's passions, another; it was rumoured, being the said milkmaid, which, if true, is lent irony by the fact that Diana was also known to the Greeks as the Goddess of Chastity!

At one time, there was an aviary in its grounds, home to parrots and golden pheasants, but this has long since gone. Paine also built the Roman Bridge which spans Temple Pool in Temple Wood, formerly known as London Bridge, since it once carried the main driveway leading from Watling Street to the house. Indeed, the wood was planted by Brown to screen the house from Watling Street, which skirted the house on the eastern side.

Within Temple Wood is the recently-restored Lady Joan's Garden, a cascade garden created by the family in memory of the 5th Earl's youngest daughter, who died in 1935 at the tragically early age of nineteen as the result of a riding accident.

Following the death in 2009 of Lady

Anne Cowdray, Lady Joan's sister, a second Memorial Garden was laid out in 2012, funded by a financial gift from the Cowdray family, into which she had married. A new seating area enables visitors to look over to the Hall across the formal gardens.

Restoration work at Weston has been on-going for ten years and has involved clearing 80% of the rhododendron so beloved by the Victorians, opening up vistas which had been obscured for decades. However, when this is completed, the hard landscape will remain. Martin emphasised that successive generations had contributed to the development of the landscape, notably Gerald, the 6th Earl, who succeeded to the title in 1957. He added greatly to the plantations in the park, and his expertise in forestry was recognised by the award of a Gold Medal by the Royal Forestry Society.

Martin pointed out that, when it came to deciding which trees to plant, Brown did not allow himself to be held back by tradition and included trees of more recent provenance, and, had he been alive today, would no doubt have taken

advantage of species which have arrived in this country in more recent years. It was therefore important, Martin believed, that restoration should be sympathetic to these later developments.

Like Trentham, Weston faced the same twin problems of climate change and imported disease; in particular, the horse chestnuts, some of which pre-date Brown, are threatened by leaf miner, though, fortunately, ash die-back had not yet been detected.

The tour continued with a walk through the formal gardens in front of the house, designed by the Victorian landscape designer, Edward Kemp, past Lady Joan's Garden.

From there we passed into the Tear Drop Garden, so-called because of the shape of the flower bed at the centre of which was the statue of the Weeping Lady. Tradition has it that she was a servant at the Hall who, having fallen hopelessly in love with one of the family, took her own life; a more prosaic explanation offered by Martin that it once stood over the grave of a child!

From there, we walked through the Shrewsbury Walk, the second of the two eighteenth-century pleasure grounds that are a unique feature of Weston.

It was intended that the visit should end with a ride on the miniature railway which skirts Temple Wood, but the rain which had been our companion throughout the two-hour walk made this impossible. Nonetheless, such was the interest generated by Martin's informed commentary that it made little impact on the enjoyment of the visit.

### ***“The garden that defeated Brown”***

In July, the Trust visited the **Elvaston Castle Country Park**, in neighbouring Derbyshire, where we were taken round by Pete Hogg, Elvaston's Head Gardener for ten years before his secondment to the County Council's offices in Matlock, where he now fulfils an administrative rôle, though he still remains active at Elvaston.

Elvaston's connection with Brown was, to say the least, tenuous! Invited to visit Elvaston by the 3rd Earl of Harrington, Brown had found the flatness of the terrain too daunting to accept a commission to remodel the grounds, concluding that “the place is so flat and there is such a want of capability to it”, though, as a sweetener, he did donate six Cedars of Lebanon to the Earl, at least one of which still survives.

Instead, the 4th Earl was to commission a little-known designer called William Barron to redesign them.

Born in Scotland in 1805, Barron had worked in the Royal Botanic Garden in Edinburgh before moving south to England, where he worked at Syon House, in Middlesex, the home of the Duke of Westminster.

While still only twenty-five, Barron was brought to Elvaston by the 4th Earl with instructions to create a new garden ‘second to none’, which he intended as a romantic tribute to his wife (and erstwhile mistress), the actress Maria Foote, and which would reflect the Earl's own interest in medieval chivalry. Barron would spend the next twenty years working at Elvaston.

His first task was to drain the water-



logged site; this he did by digging a mile-long ditch to a lower level of the terrain. The high water table has led to the loss of lots of trees owing to their roots sitting in water; to avoid which some trees been planted on mounds.

Barron brought in full-size trees using a technique which made his name and for which he is now best remembered. He planted every known species of conifer and is said to have planted 1000 golden yews as well as exotic species which included what is claimed to be one of the first monkey puzzle trees planted in this country. Such was Barron's arboricultural expertise that Joseph Paxton himself employed him on a number of occasions, and, on one occasion, even Queen Victoria's gardener sought his help when he visited Elvaston in search of a replacement for a noble birch to replace one lost at Osborne House.

Barron divided the garden at Elvaston

into separate compartments, each with its own character: there was an Italian garden based on designs from Tuscany; a bower garden known as “Mon Plaisir”, based on a seventeenth-century design (which, because of its flower-shaped flower bed, became known as “The Garden of the Fair Star”); and the Alhambra Garden, complete with a recently-restored Moorish temple. Once completed, the garden remained inaccessible to all but the Earl and Countess, the Earl declaring, “If the Queen comes, Barron, show her round, but admit no-one else”, a reaction, no doubt, to their having been excluded from polite society because of the scandal surrounding their marriage (By contrast, the 5th Earl, who succeeded in 1851, opened the grounds to the public, who flocked to Elvaston in their thousands, undaunted by the high entrance fee of three shillings, no doubt intended to exclude the hoi poloi!).

The gardens are particularly well known

Elvaston Castle  
The Parterre Garden which replaced  
The Garden of the Fair Star



for their rockwork; much of the original rockwork has been eroded or re-located, but enough remains for members to appreciate how it would have impressed any Victorian visitor. This includes "The Mound", the Grade II Listed remains of a folly constructed to resemble a ruined castle, which the Duke of Wellington described as "the only natural artificial rock work I have seen".

Once described as "amongst the most remarkable of Regal Houses in England" the house and grounds are now in the ownership of Derbyshire County Council, and, since 1970, has been run as a country park.

Elvaston Park was, in fact, the first country park to be opened in this country, and the public enjoy the freedom to roam, thereby creating a major problem from a gardener's point of view (of which there are now only five where once there were ninety-three!). The park, which costs in the region of £1m. a year to run, is heavily visited, and, as a consequence, paths and trails become compacted, shrubs are damaged and even stolen, and irresponsible dog owners allow their pets to roam at will, fouling as they go. In particular, the topiary for which the gardens were once noted has, over the

years, suffered from neglect and damage, but work is now under way to restore the gardens to their original glory.

The Castle itself, which is Grade II\* Listed, was built in 1633, but was remodelled in the castellated Gothick style by James Wyatt in 1817.

At a time when it is facing diminishing financial resources, Derbyshire County Council now is confronted by the daunting task of securing a sustainable future for both the Castle (in November 2010 it was estimated that it would cost £6.4m. to carry out essential repairs to the buildings and the landscape) and the estate. An earlier decision to lease the Castle to a private company proposing to convert it into a luxury hotel and to grant permission for a golf course to be laid out in the grounds was vigorously resisted by The Friends of Elvaston Castle, a voluntary organisation founded in 2004 to ensure the future of the estate as a country amenity, who feared that leasing the estate to a private company would lead to the public being denied access to areas which it was at present free to roam, as well as impacting adversely on a designated nature reserve adjoining the grounds but still part of the country park.

The first steps have been taken down the long road to full restoration; currently, the County Council is in the process of creating a Charitable Trust to carry out work identified by the Elvaston Castle Development Board set up in 2015 with the task of developing a sustainable future for the estate, in which they are being advised by The National Trust. In the meantime, the Council has completed work on restoring the roof of the Castle at a cost of £725,000 and is hoping to be able to host weddings in the Gothic Hall from the spring of next year.

Major challenges remain; costs must be calculated and priorities identified. Every lover of historic parks will wish them well.

### ***Visionary or Vandal?***

For the Trust, CB300 ended with a stimulating talk by Joe Hawkins, Head of Landscape at Hagley Hall, during which he dissected Brown's reputation as an innovating genius.

He disputed whether Brown's work could even be described as innovative; Brown's ideas were not entirely his own, drawn, as Horace Walpole pointed out, from those of his contemporaries,

William Kent and Philip Southcote, while the 'signature' features associated with Brown's landscapes had either been practised by earlier generations – like the management of water and the large scale movement of soil (largely for defensive purposes) – or, like trees, had been the object of veneration whose spiritual significance had been illuminated by poets and painters.

A major criticism Joe levelled at Brown was the absence of meaning, the best example of which was William Kent's garden at Rousham, where judiciously placed monuments ensured the constant engagement of the visitor, who was expected to draw on a classical education enhanced by the Grand Tour – or, in the case of Stowe, evoke a sympathetic political response. Nor were Brown's landscapes true to the Nature of artists such as the Dutch painters, whose paintings often highlighted the ruggedness of natural scenery and the insignificance of Man and by comparison with which Brown's landscapes were polished.

Brown's intention of 'improving' existing

landscapes, that is, 'improving' on their natural forms by removing anything that was rugged, resulted in reducing them to an unchallenging blandness, unlike Hagley, untouched by Brown or any other fashionable eighteenth-century landscape gardener, where George Lyttleton designed a landscape of changing moods in which the visitor passed from melancholy-inducing woodland to the tranquillity of open pasture.

For Joe, 'Capability' Brown should rather be known as 'Corporability' Bland, the popularity of whose work in his lifetime (he is said to have worked at no fewer than 170 sites) Joe likened to the modern craze for decking! At a different level, decking, like Brown's landscapes, had gripped the imagination of a section of contemporary society, even though, imported from a drier climate, it was not ideal for gardens exposed to the wet and humid weather experienced here.

Naturally, Joe's downbeat assessment of Brown was immediately challenged in the Q & A session which followed his presentation. Wasn't he overlooking the fact that his landscapes, often tailored

to suit his clients' individual tastes, had surely given their owners a huge amount of enjoyment? Didn't it appeal not least because it removed the financial strain on landowners to maintain the formal gardens of previous generations? Didn't it bring back into commercial use land which had hitherto been exclusively scenic, combining the twin values of land, namely, the scenic and the productive?

Viewed economically, had not Brown simply recognised the existence of a market and offered a product which many landowners had found attractive? Eventually, of course, an alternative philosophy already in existence but not yet fashionable – the Picturesque – would prevail, but at his moment in time Brown had spotted a market and could not be condemned for exploiting it!

Thanking Joe for offering members such a challenging talk, Alan Taylor, the Trust's Chairman, said that as a consequence we would all go away reviewing the orthodoxy which CB300 might have uncritically fed and perhaps modifying it in the light of some of the points we had heard.

**W.B.S**



Elvaston Castle  
Example of Elvaston's rockwork

# “A Haven of Rest for Walsall Town Folk”

In December 1942, while World War Two still had nearly three more years to run, the Borough Surveyor set out what he called “Tentative suggestions for the future of Town Planning in Walsall”, one of whose proposals was the demolition of four thousand slum dwellings in the Borough, including the sub-standard houses which crowded round St. Matthew’s Church (demolition of slum dwellings in the Church Hill area had, in fact, begun as early as 1852 as part of an early slum clearance programme, but had not been given priority in the overall scheme. It had resumed in the 1930s, but had been halted at the onset of the war and did not resume until 1948, when it was given an urgency by being declared an Area of Special Development prioritised for reconstruction).

Once the Borough Surveyor’s ‘suggestions’ were formalised into a development plan, however, it would be many years before they were to reach fruition.

“The Church Hill Memorial Scheme”, of which the laying out of a memorial garden was to become the first phase, was part of the wider development plan which would create an open space around St. Matthew’s Church. In their choice of designer, Councillors were not without ambition, and, having decided that “the best course was to lay out Church Hill in a manner befitting the sacrifice that had been made in the wars”, determined to enlist “the best professional advice suitable in this or any country”, though it must be added that the decision to go ahead with the scheme was by no means unanimous, eighteen members of the Council voting for it, fifteen against (“I am bound to confess,” said Sir Cliff Tibbits, Chairman of the Planning Committee, speaking at the opening ceremony, “that when the scheme was first suggested it was thought to be altogether too grandiose and expensive for the town and the times,” adding that it was largely due to the Vicar, Cannon A. T. Jenkins, that the scheme went ahead).

The Council’s choice fell on Geoffrey Jellicoe, the foremost landscape architect of his generation, and the scheme he presented to them included twenty two-storey “flatted houses”, each with its own separate entrance and washing facilities, and two shops. Laid out as part of a three-sided

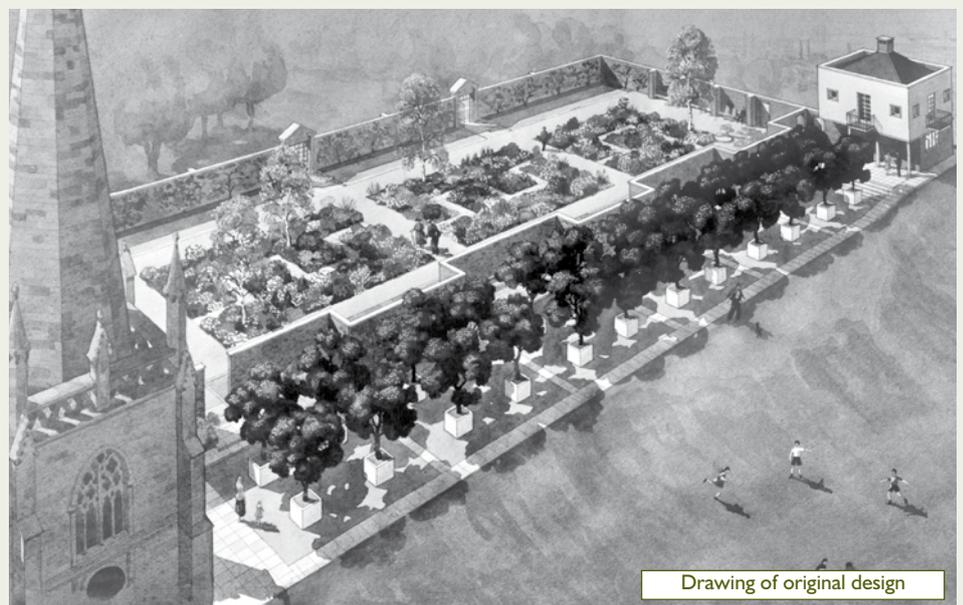
arrangement flanked by the garden and the relocated Brotherhood Hall, it was to be known as “St. Matthew’s Close”. The flats were to be occupied by people in the “higher income group” and, once occupied, were to be self-financing.

However, the close-like effect that Jellicoe’s design would have created was reduced when the Hall, now St. Matthew’s Centre, was rotated ninety degrees.

Fulfilment of the scheme depended on the piece-by-piece acquisition of the land, which involved the removal of factories and the demolition of existing houses, as well as the laying out of a new road, and work did not commence on this part of the development until early 1955, four years after the garden was opened. Thereafter, the pace of development was restricted by how much money

was available each year.

As the Mayor, Councillor W. E. Wheway, was to point out to Princess Margaret, when she came to unveil the commemorative stone in the still-to-be-completed garden, it occupied land on what had once been the centre of medieval Walsall until, by the nineteenth century, the commercial centre of the town had shifted westward down the hill to its present position. Most of the land on which the garden stood had belonged to the proprietor of The Ideal Leather Case Company, Frank Powell, who had wanted it used for a recreational ground for the young people of the town as a living memorial to the fallen. However, the Corporation envisaged it as “a place of peace and quiet rather than one where the exuberant spirits of youth could be given full vent”, so, instead, the land was sold to the Corporation



Drawing of original design

at a nominal sum and the money then given by the Corporation to the church, to be used to build a recreation ground elsewhere.

### Funding the Garden

The cost of the garden, which was also to be designed by Jellicoe, was set at £10,000 with an extra £500 for the planting of shrubs, the cost included Jellicoe's fees of either 4% of £10,000, 2% R. I. B. A. fee and 15% of the cost of the plants, or 7½% overall, which amounted to a similar total (A supplementary estimate of £500 in respect of additional expenditure in planting the garden and adjacent land was later approved). Work on the garden began at the beginning of March 1951 and, by the time it was completed, its cost had risen to £15,000 (in excess of £300,000 in today's money, according to Bank of England figures).

Just six years after the country had emerged from a world war which had left it on the brink of bankruptcy, funding was to prove complicated. The Council began the process of applying to the Ministry of Health for a loan sanction to borrow £10,645, but were immediately rebuffed; they were informed that the proportion of the

Ministry's funds allotted to parks and open spaces was very small, and the application would most certainly fail. Instead, they were advised that an application for a loan of between £2000 and £2500 would most probably be granted, and the Town Clerk was straightway authorised to make an application to borrow £2500.

An attempt to present the scheme as part of the approaching "Festival of Britain" celebrations was also rebuffed, the Council being told that such celebrations should be funded out of revenue (The Festival of Britain was a national exhibition held throughout the country in the summer and autumn of 1951 to showcase the country's contribution to science, technology, industrial design, architecture and the arts – and to give the morale of the country a boost following the dark years of the war and post-war austerity).

However, on a more positive note, the Council were at the same time advised that the Ministry might view the scheme more favourably if the Council were to emphasise that the project was intended as a war memorial.

Undeterred, the Council set the first

part of the scheme in motion by diverting part of the £3500 already sanctioned for the improvement of Church Hill towards the cost of planting.

### The Garden

The garden, initially called "The Garden of Remembrance" (and subsequently referred to in both the singular and the plural, even in the same set of Council Minutes!), is rectangular in shape, measuring seventy metres (or approximately seventy-six yards) in length and twenty-five metres (or approximately twenty-seven yards) in width.

Its design reflects Jellicoe's early interest in the Italian Renaissance garden, about which, in collaboration with John C. Shepherd, he wrote a book which is regarded as a pioneering study, "Italian Gardens of the Renaissance", published in 1925.

The enclosed 'giardino secreto' combined the pleasures of affording a quiet, contemplative environment amongst the colour and scent of the flowers with the opportunity to view the landscape beyond through carefully placed viewing points pierced in the walls.



Terrace immediately after restoration

Jellicoe's garden is encompassed on all four sides by a wall three metres high, which provides protection to the plants and seclusion to the visitor. It is punctuated on its east side by three gated entrances, spaced at equal distances, each surmounted by a stone pediment, while along the west side run three bays, each accommodating a white-painted seat and flanked by boxes of brick planted with shrubs, and each pierced by openings from which the adjoining landscape could be viewed. In the original plan, there was to be a total of fourteen seats, also designed by Geoffrey Jellicoe, set around the garden, each, it was hoped, to be donated in memory of a deceased family member.

At the northern end of the garden there was a raised concrete pool eight metres in diameter, with a single-jet fountain at its centre; the pool is now drained and the fountain has been removed.

Below the west wall, an external flagged terrace lined with whitebeams and lime trees planted in square concrete boxes was intended to give a panoramic view over the town in the direction of Wolverhampton.

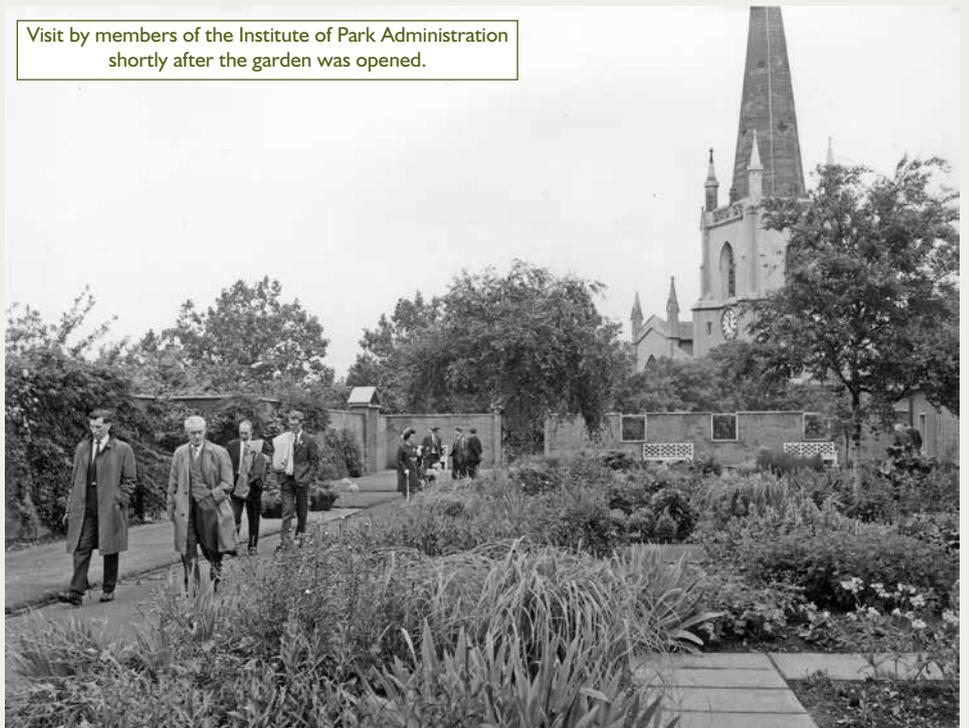
The main part of the garden was laid out in flower-beds approximately fifty feet by forty feet closely planted with herbaceous plants, hardy and half-hardy shrubs and annuals. Tall plants such as hollyhocks, delphiniums and foxgloves were planted amongst them, and prominent amongst the planting were a number of birch trees which were to give height to the garden without casting shade on the plants beneath them.

Forsythia and ceanothus were trained along the walls.

A contemporary description of the garden lists aquilegia hybrid, ceanothus "Gloire de Versailles", red hot poker, foxtail lily, Chinese meadow rue and sea holly amongst the species planted in the garden.

In the south-east corner of the garden stood a house which was originally intended for the gardener, but instead became a police house when the Council were advised that this would make funding more easily obtainable. The occupant's duties included

Visit by members of the Institute of Park Administration shortly after the garden was opened.

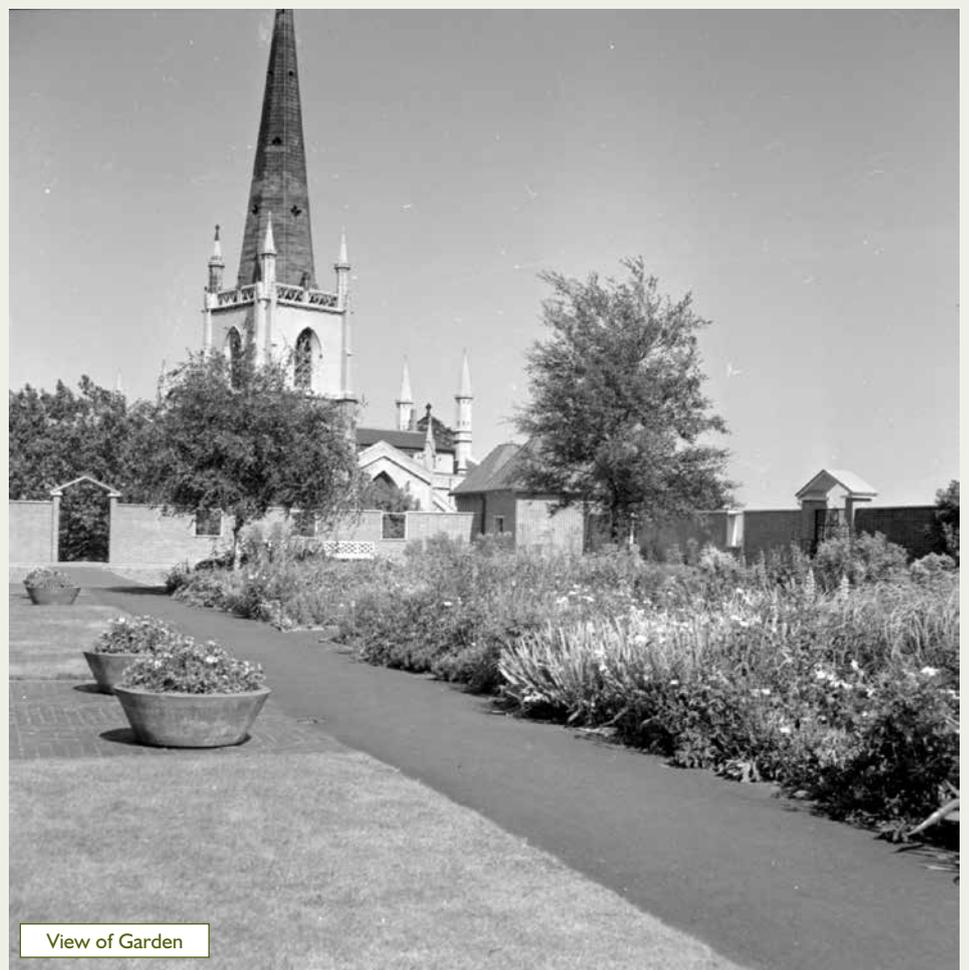


opening and shutting the garden each day.

However, this was later to present the Council with an obstacle when Councillors wanted to use the house to accommodate a gardener/caretaker to reduce the incidence of wanton damage to the garden, only resolved when, in 1964, the Walsall police force became part of the West Midlands

Police Authority, and the Council were able to 'appropriate' the house by transferring ownership of the house from the Watch Committee to the Public Works Committee.

A memorial chapel intended to house two Books of Remembrance recording the names of Walsall men and women who lost their lives in the two World Wars was opened in 1964.



View of Garden

A proposal to add a carillon funded from a legacy was rejected by its Trustees, who insisted that the terms of the legacy, which had specified erecting the carillon on top of the Council House, initially rejected by the Council as not acceptable "for a variety of reasons", were strictly adhered to (The carillon was eventually erected on top of the Council House following structural alterations). Jellicoe commented that, whilst the carillon would have been attractive, it was not essential to the scheme and suggested that in the absence of a carillon some such feature as a fountain could be introduced instead, a suggestion that Councillors did not take up, however, probably because it would have undoubtedly added to the cost of the scheme.

### Two Ceremonies

On May 1st, 1951, on a day marred by at times torrential rain, Princess Margaret, the younger daughter of the then reigning monarch, George VI, unveiled a commemorative stone in the incomplete garden recording its status as a memorial to the dead of the two World Wars.

The circular-shaped stone of solid slate measured five feet in diameter and was four inches thick. It was designed by Gordon Herickx, a Sculpture Master at the Walsall School of Art and a professional sculptor, and inscribed with words which recorded its ceremonial unveiling by the Princess.

The ceremony was part of a two-and-a-half hour visit to the Borough, the first time she had visited an English town on her own, during which the twenty-year-old Princess was first taken to a chain-making factory, after qualms about the appropriateness of exposing her to an industry "not quite suitable for the ladies" had been overcome, and afterwards to the Arboretum, where she inspected a parade of youth organisations before finally taking tea at the Mayor's Parlour at the Council House before her departure for Lichfield.

Exactly a year later, on 1st May, 1952, the garden was officially opened by the Mayor of Walsall, Alderman Tom E. Mayo, using a silver key donated by Jellicoe. (Pointing out that the King

had died just three months previously, the Deputy Town Clerk had suggested that the Council might like to consider postponing the ceremony out of respect for the Royal Family, one of whose members had unveiled the memorial stone, but Councillors clearly did not share their Deputy Clerk's sensitivity, deciding instead that "no useful purpose would be served by postponing the date"). Speaking at the ceremony, Geoffrey Jellicoe drew attention to the purpose of the garden, saying that an endeavour had been made in planting the garden to show that plants of different varieties could live together successfully, and that he thought it was within the power of humanity to do likewise, symbolism which would probably have eluded most visitors unless they were equipped with the requisite horticultural knowledge!

Sadly, not two months had passed after the garden had been opened to the public before the Council were receiving complaints about litter (attributed to workmen using the garden during their lunch-time break). There was also a complaint about the lack of a public convenience (the provision for which had been struck out of the original plan as a cost-cutting measure), as well as scratches to the memorial stone, caused, it was suggested, by children kicking up the surrounding gravel while playing (the pathways are now paved with brick). An undertaking to address the first of these grievances by providing toilet facilities close to the garden does not seem to have been followed through, while a suggestion that the stone be mounted on a wall was rejected. Instead, a small protective wall was proposed.

The following year, the garden was closed for two days after 'crowds' of children caused more damage, while, five years after the garden had opened, the Vicar of St. Matthew's



Exterior View of the Chapel

reported that "few people visited the Memorial Garden."

Unfortunately, not all who did came to enjoy the peace and tranquillity the garden offered: in 1993, the Council were accused of leaving the garden "to rot" and warned that "unless something is done it is going into a spiral of decay". The garden had become "a magnet for vandals, drunks and prostitutes". The windows of the memorial chapel had been broken, graffiti sprayed on its walls, and the roof partly torn off. Coping stones had been pushed off the perimeter walls, while the original Police house, which had been used as a grounds maintenance store and rest room, had become "a haunt for undesirables", the interior having largely been gutted by fire and the roof having collapsed. It took a three-year campaign supported by the local press before work on a £50,000 restoration project was begun, part funded by the European Regional Development Fund, to which the Council allocated £21,500.

The tarmac and concrete-edged paths were replaced with a brick paving, the pool repaired, the walls re-pointed and the coping-stones re-set. A little later, the external viewing terrace was re-laid with brick, and some of the concrete planters which contained whitebeams and lime trees replaced,

only for the trees to be vandalised soon afterwards!

Initially, Councillors decided against repairing the house and finding a tenant who would accept responsibility for the security of the garden and voted instead to demolish it, though for this the permission of the Environmental Secretary would have first been needed, since the house was in a conservation area, so instead it was renovated and tenanted before finally being sold into private ownership.

In 1996 the garden was granted Grade II Listed status by English Heritage, the Council being advised by its Strategic Services Manager that this would “assist in its future preservation for the benefit of the whole community” and “enhance Walsall’s national profile (which has not benefited recently from the wide publicity given to the Art Gallery and Bus Station proposals)”, whose modern design were thought by many to clash with the more traditional designs of, in the first instance, the Baroque-styled Edwardian Town Hall and, in the second, the Victorian-Gothic St. Paul’s Church, designed by J. L. Pearson, architect of Truro Cathedral.

Undoubtedly, the high walls surrounding the garden, designed to provide the seclusion appropriate for remembrance and reflection, also provided concealment and, equally, could deter; one local resident, who acknowledged that he passed the garden on his way to work every day, admitted, when asked when the garden was open, that, until that moment, he had had no idea of what lay behind the walls!

Concern over vandalism remained a recurring theme in reports received by the Council, and, even today, the

garden, though a designated war memorial and listed Grade II by English Heritage, is kept locked after it became, in the words of another resident of St. Matthew’s Close, “a haven for druggies”.

#### W. B. S.

(Footnote: In 1995 Jellicoe (by this time “Sir Geoffrey Jellicoe”) drew a sketch for developing Digbeth Street Market, the area immediately below Church Hill, the centre of which, taking advantage of the downward slope of the terrain, was to be a long narrow canal which tapered to half its width at its lower end.

At the top would be a rectangular pool at right angles to the canal in which was a line of six fountains whose five-foot jets would conceal traffic passing along the road above. The canal would be divided into four equal parts by footways, below each of which was to be placed a chader, a device whose function was to interrupt the flow of water, causing it to ripple and sparkle. The canal would be bordered by grass verges, beyond which would be space for the market stalls.

Below the canal there was to be a paved piazza with a circular pool, at the centre of which would be a multiple fountain. A paved pathway would run three-quarters of the way round the edge of the pool. The piazza was to be planted with six-foot high clipped hedges within which there would be recesses for seats. Moveable tubs of flowers would complete the layout.

The design, which Jellicoe noted was based on incomplete information and is not to scale, was never implemented. It is dated ‘March 1995’, the year before Jellicoe’s death at the age of ninety-five)



Sources consulted in the preparation of this article included: Minutes of Walsall Council, 1939-54, 1963-65, 1993-94; “Walsall Chronicle”, 1951-59, 1994; “Walsall Chronicle”, January 1959; “Design of Church Hill Memorial Gardens”; Thesis by Clifford R. V. Tandy, A. R. I. B. A, 1952; English Heritage List Entry Summary, 1999.

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