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A walk round Lichfield's historic parks and gardens

In the days leading up to the walk, the country recorded record temperatures, and the fear was that, in the two hours the walk was expected to take, members would be wilting under the heat; in the event, of course, rain fell continuously, and a dozen hardy members and friends proceeded on a shortened tour clad in waterproofs and sheltering under umbrellas! Nonetheless, led by a knowledgeable and entertaining guide like Jonathan Oates, an experienced city guide better known as "Jono", there was much to learn and enjoy.

The tour began in the Museum Gardens, the oldest part of Beacon Park, Lichfield's premier park, which was first opened to the public in 1859, and visitors, impressed by the immaculate state in which the park is maintained or the colourfulness of its flowerbeds, cannot be blamed for not knowing that this was once marshland, made available for public use when silt was spread over it, taken from Minster Pool, of which it was once part before a causeway divided the lake into two parts.

Minster Pool and its neighbour, the larger Stowe Pool, are both man-made, and provided support for two mills, a tannery and a fishery. They once supplied water to the Black Country when they were leased by the South Waterworks Company.

Minster Pool was given its serpentine shape, when it was dredged in the 1770s, in imitation of the Serpentine in London following a campaign led by Anna Seward, the celebrated "Swan of Lichfield".

Given to the City and County of Lichfield in 1968, Minster Pool is now the responsibility of Lichfield City Council and Stowe Pool, popular with anglers, that of Lichfield District Council.



Statue of Capt. John Smith

continued overleaf



Former Library

The Museum Gardens were given their name because they stood next to the Lichfield Free Library and Museum, built on land sold to the city council by John Law, the Diocesan Chancellor, who was passionate in his belief that the poor should have free access to books. It was built in 1857 in the Italian style made popular by Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, who had designed Osborne House in that style.

Lichfield's Free Library was only the second to be built in the country following the passing of the Public Libraries Act in 1850, which gave local boroughs the power to establish free libraries, the first being in Salford, and was unusual insofar as the popularity of the style was generally limited to the south of the country and not widely adopted further north.

However, what Chancellor Law had overlooked was that the poor were not only impoverished and therefore could not afford books, but very few were literate! Consequently, an appeal for donations of books met with very limited success (even though Chancellor Law set a good example by donating the £25

he had received for the sale of the land), and a proposal to increase the rates by a halfpenny to furnish the library with books met with strong resistance from those who had no use for it.

The building is now the home of the Lichfield Registry Office, said to be the most popular in the county, the Library having moved in 1989, first to the former Friary Girls' School and, in 2018, to the deconsecrated St. Mary's Church in the city's main square.

Two statues occupy dominant positions in the Gardens, the one of Edward VII in coronation robes, holding a sceptre, the other of Captain Smith, captain of the "Titanic", on its ill-fated maiden voyage.

Carved in Portland stone, the king's statue, unveiled in 1908, was donated to the city by one of its principal benefactors, Robert Bridgeman, to mark his year as Sheriff of Lichfield. The family business of Robert Bridgeman & Sons, which traded for more than eighty years, was noted for its skill in stone-masonry and woodcarving, working not only on Lichfield's Cathedral, but on both of Birmingham's cathedrals, St. Philip's and

St. Chad's, as well as the Ryland Library in Manchester, before being taken over by the Linford Group in 1968.

Sculpted by Kathleen Scott, the widow of the Antarctic explorer, Captain Robert Scott, and paid for by public subscription, Captain Smith's statue was NOT, as some believe, situated in Lichfield following its rejection by Hanley, Smith's birth place, because the town's authorities were embarrassed by his part in the loss of his ship; documents show that Lichfield was chosen because it lies midway between London and Liverpool, home to the headquarters of the company which owned the vessel.

Furthermore, the inscription on the base of the statue proclaims that, far from being condemned as a pariah, Captain Smith had bequeathed to his countrymen "the memory & example of a great heart, brave life and a heroic death". The statue was unveiled on July 27th, 1914, by his daughter Helen in the presence of a number of dignitaries.

The fountain was another of Chancellor Law's gifts to the city, though the lions were added later.



Garden of Remembrance

Beacon Park now extends to more than seventy acres, the result of the generosity of another of Lichfield's generous benefactors, Colonel Michael Swinfen-Broun, who wished to see beautiful gardens in which the citizens of Lichfield "may be encouraged to enjoy rest and recreation". It offers a wide range of leisure activities for residents of all ages, including golf, bowls, football and tennis, as well as wide, well-paved paths along which to promenade, and a segregated play area equipped with many attractive features.

It also accommodates the Peace Woodland, a newly-planted labyrinth made up of 1918 trees to mark the centenary of the Armistice that brought an end to World War One, a Cedar of Lebanon, a symbol of hope, its centrepiece.

Another piece of unusual masonry is to be found in the secluded Herbaceous or Rose Garden. Known as "The Martyrs' Plaque", it is composed of the remains of a sculpture mounted on a plinth depicting the dismembered bodies of the three

kings who were slain by the Romans in a battle fought in 288 AD on the outskirts of the city and whose bodies were dismembered by the victors as a final act of humiliation.

Originally set into the façade of Lichfield's Guildhall, it was moved to the Museum Gardens when the Guildhall was re-built in the nineteenth century, located first in a rockery inside the balustrade at the front of the Gardens and finally to its present position in 2010.

From here, it was a short walk to the Erasmus Darwin House, once the home of the renowned doctor, botanist, writer and poet – and, of course, grandfather of the better-known Charles, who, sixty years later, was to develop some of his grandfather's ideas about evolution in his "The Origin of Species".

Erasmus Darwin was one of the founder-members of The Lunar Society, a learned society-cum-dining-club established in 1775 and so-called because its monthly meetings were held when the moon was full, making travelling easier. Members included Josiah Wedgwood, James Watt, and Joseph Priestley, and meetings were

held at Darwin's house or at Soho House, Matthew Boulton's Birmingham home. Our interest was not in the house itself, now run as a museum, but in the herb garden at the back. Developed in 1999, it is not on the site of Darwin's original garden, which was situated on the outskirts of the city and was much bigger in size, but is designed to illustrate the full range of herbs used in his time for cooking and other domestic purposes, medicine and dyeing.

The garden is divided into five sections. In the Culinary Garden may be found herbs used for flavouring food – thyme, parsley, sage, borage and chives - and aromatic herbs used for potpourri to sweeten the house, while in the Apothecary's Garden may be seen St. John's Wort, whose oil was used to treat wounds, Soapwort, whose oil was used as a soap, and White Horehound, used to relieve indigestion.

Dr. Darwin's Medicine Chest contains poppies (for opium), foxgloves for heart conditions, valerian for sleeping, chamomile (used as an emetic) and rhubarb (for "cleansing"), while the Dyer's Garden contains plants used for colouring fabrics, and the plants grown in the



Statue of Edward VII

Scented Garden were once used to bring fragrant aromas to the house.

From here, we went a short distance round the corner to the secluded Vicars Close. Approached through a narrow and enclosed passageway, it has a range of half-timbered houses built between 1315 and 1500 around three sides of a quadrangle college-style, a common hall occupying the fourth. Here, John Saville, a member of the Vicars Choral noted for the beauty of his voice, once lived with his wife and family. His relationship with Anna Seward, who lived in the Cathedral Close with her father, a canon of the Cathedral, led to scandal, though Anna herself insisted that she loved Saville for his virtue and “no law on earth or heaven forbids that he should be my friend or debars the liberty of conversing together”. Anna was in her lifetime described as “the most famous woman poet in England”. Arbiter of fashion, early feminist, she was friend to Walter Scott, Samuel Johnson, Sarah Siddons and Erasmus Darwin.

At the centre of the quadrangle is a large raised circular flower bed where once there was a tree around which a

belief grew that, if it were to die, the Cathedral would fall into ruin. However, it was removed three years ago and the Cathedral still stands, making one wonder where these superstitions come from!

Well-stocked flower beds run along the side of the houses, adding colour to the tranquillity of the Close.

Our walk back towards the city centre led us to the Garden of Remembrance, laid out in 1919 alongside Minster Pool, one of Lichfield two lakes, and officially opened the following year, making it one of the earliest war memorials commemorating the dead of the 1914-1918 War.

Relatively simple in design, it is rectangular in shape and divided into four by footpaths, each quarter grassed with a circular flower bed at its centre. At the far end of the garden is the memorial itself. Designed by Charles Edward Bateman, a Birmingham-based architect better known for designing houses in the Arts and Craft and Queen Anne styles and crafted by Charles Bridgeman and Sons, its dominant feature is the figure of St. George, below which six panels record the names of Lichfield citizens

who lost their lives in both the First World War and, added later, the Second. It is also home to the only Verdun Oak in Staffordshire, albeit second generation. Its picturesque setting, overlooking Minster Pool, has led to its being described as one of the most beautiful in the country.

Our last visit was to Monks Walk, a secluded garden adjacent to the University Campus, whose name reminded us that it stood on what was once the site of a medieval friary. Once within the precincts of the Lichfield Girls' High School, it was destined to become part of the University's car park before the intervention of a group of volunteers, who restored and maintained the garden from 2003 until 2014, when the building was bought for developing into apartments by Pegasus.

For the next three years, the garden lay neglected, until in March 2017, residents of the newly-occupied apartments and members of the previous volunteer group convened and with financial support of Pegasus began the task of restoring it.



Their work is open for public viewing, and visitors will, like us, be able to appreciate the group's horticultural skills and application.

Long and narrow with curved ends, it is shaped like an amphitheatre and provided space for gentle promenading, although, after being taken round the garden on their first day at the school, girls were told that, thereafter, it was strictly out of bounds (because, the girls were convinced, teachers liked to go there in their free time for a crafty smoke!). The central bed is planted with trees and tall shrubs, and trees screen the garden from the existing car park, but the bed which runs along the wall dividing it from the former library buildings is planted with flowers and shrubs from different periods.

This brought our walk to an end. While some headed home, others went in search of a warming cup of tea, but all of us would have left Lichfield fully aware that the city's attractions are not exclusively architectural, thanks to Jono's encyclopaedic knowledge and engaging enthusiasm.

(This article is based on Jono's commentary, augmented from a number of literary sources including "The Lichfield Book of Days", by Neil Coley; "Cathedral City" by Howard Clayton; and "A-Z of Lichfield", by Jono Oates; information provided by the Erasmus Darwin House; and a number of websites. Photos by the Editor).



“A place of pilgrimage for people of taste”

The recorded history of Enville begins in the 1530s, when a minor branch of the Grey family, of whom Lady Jane Grey, “the nine-days Queen” was perhaps the most notable member, moved to Staffordshire from the family home in Leicestershire, where they built “a very proper brick house” at Enville. After the family had been created Earls of Stamford in the following century, Enville became the family home, and Harry, the fourth Earl, who inherited the estate in 1739, set about laying out a garden and landscaping in a naturalistic style the estate, which he had expanded using the wealth which he had acquired through his marriage to Lady Jane Booth, daughter and heiress of the Earl of Warrington, owner of Dunham Massey (Mary inherited Dunham Massey on the death of her father, and their son, the 5th Earl, inherited the estate when she died in 1772).

In this he followed the example of his near neighbours, Lord Lyttelton, at Hagley Hall, and William Shenstone at The Leasowes, near Halesowen. It was Shenstone in particular, who had laid out his own estate, more restricted in size, as a *ferme ornée*, who made the most significant contribution to the development at Enville, though no documentary evidence of his involvement survives other than diary entries (which has caused Jane Bradney, the Estate Archivist, and our guide to question how significant it actually was).

The Earl did not, however, turn to the most pre-eminent landscape designer of the age, for, as Jane pointed out, Brown’s style was to ‘sculpt’ landscapes,

whereas the topography at Enville was already composed of gently-rising hills, woods and running water and provided scope for creating the eye-catching prospects which were central to eighteenth-century landscape design.

Someone who has left a lasting impression on the landscape is Sanderson Miller, an amateur architect who owned Radway Grange, a small estate in Warwickshire, and who is noted for the picturesque follies he designed for the estates of his friends. He is perhaps best known for the mock ruined castles to be seen at Hagley Hall, in neighbouring Worcestershire, and Wimpole Hall, in Lincolnshire.

He worked for both the fourth and

fifth Earls at Enville, but, of the many features attributed to him, there is documentary evidence for only the Gothic Greenhouse; for the others, like the Gothic Boathouse and the Gothic Gateway, there are compelling stylistic similarities with features he is known to have designed. The Doric Temple is also attributed to him, and the upper of the two cascades bears a striking resemblance to those he designed at Wroxton, in Warwickshire.

The fifth Earl was to show a similar independence of mind when he decided to develop the house; while he consulted both Sir William Chambers, best known today for designing the ten-storey pagoda in Kew Gardens, and Sir Robert Mylne, a minor figure



Enville Hall

in the neo-classical movement, he did not turn to Robert Adam, the foremost architect of his time, instead commissioning a lesser-known Liverpool architect, John Hope, Snr, who extended the house to the west, Gothicised the front of the Tudor building and, somewhat incongruously, gave the rear of the house a Palladian façade. In 1904, the Hall was ravaged by a fire which left it roofless, but it was subsequently restored.

In developing the grounds the Earl took full advantage of the natural features, in particular the streams which ran down the hillside towards the house. Almost certainly inspired by the cascade he saw while visiting The Leasowes, he improved the sequence of cascades, in doing so providing the Earl's guests with a memorable experience when the second cascade was added shortly afterwards. The two cascades, linked step by step by a series of small pools, were fed from a hilltop reservoir, and the flow controlled by sluice gates.

Its banks planted with laurels and evergreens, it was, according to William Marshall, who visited Enville in 1803, "one of the most sublime productions the hand of Art has effected in rural scenery".

The stream emptied into Temple Pool, so called because a Chinese temple, made, it is thought, from wood and with glazed windows and reached by a bridge, once stood on a small island at the centre of the lake. The temple was later dismantled when Chinoiserie had fallen out of fashion, and replaced as a lakeside feature by a boathouse, also believed to have been designed by Sanderson Miller, though Thomas Wright, who designed the earlier landscape monuments at Shugborough, may have had a hand in building it; and it was from there that visitors enjoyed a breath-taking spectacle.

The wall of the upper room facing the lake was covered by a sliding window of coloured glass and, once his visitors had been refreshed, their host would signal to a servant to open the sluice gates, at the same time ordering the window to be opened. The ensuing roar and rush of the water would have had an electrifying effect on the visitors, one of whom even thought the torrent powerful enough to sweep away the house itself!

Sadly, the boathouse was demolished in the 1970s, when a tree fell on it, and reduced water levels mean that the cascades now flow only sluggishly,



The Gothic Greenhouse



The Cold Bath

though work is in hand to clear them. Other features that have not survived include the three-roomed thatched Cottage (also known as the Hermitage, though this designation may be a twentieth-century misnomer). It included an aviary and was used by the family as a place of retreat. From The Rotunda, which Heely describes as "an exceeding handsome light building...agreeably situated upon a bold eminence" the visitor could enjoy a prospect as far as the tower of Kinver church, "a very indifferent object", in Heely's opinion, who feared that it would be some time before newly-planted trees would restore the pristine beauty destroyed "merely for the sake of a distant object"! Its six Ionic pillars supported a domed roof, but now only the base survives, and the Grotto is now

just a heap of stones.

Ralph's Bastion, another viewing point, was built round the base of the trunk of a yew around which a wooden seat was constructed. From here the visitor could view the Hall, the Temple Pool and the Cascades

Twelve 'people of taste', all members of the Trust, took part on a warm May afternoon on a guided tour of the estate led by Jane Bradney, the estate's archivist, and accompanied by Mr. Peter Williams, husband of Mrs Diana Williams, Enville's owner. Though not quite reaching the highest point, which is marked by the ruined Shepherd's Lodge, a medieval hunting lodge converted into summerhouse from which the Clent Hills and the Wrekin can be seen, the party did negotiate a

temporary stile to access Priests Wood so as to inspect Shenstone's Chapel, dedicated to the poet after his death and never consecrated, used instead as a place for refreshment and a place to view the valley below through the double doors at the west end. The area around the Chapel was planted with yews, so as to create a sombre atmosphere that would be conducive to contemplative thought.

Our journey back to the Hall where our own refreshments awaited us took us to other features such as the Cold Bath, medically fashionable in the eighteenth century, when it was open to the elements, but subsequently provided with walls and a roof, now gone (In the days before #MeToo the use of cold baths was usually reserved for the menfolk!).

We made our way down the side of the Cascades along a path which, Jane reminded us, had been part of the original circuit and planted with evergreens, woodbine and roses. Finally, after pausing at The Gothic Greenhouse (or Billiard Room, or Museum, its name changing with its changing function), we made our way back to the house through the Long Walk, part of the Victorian garden created by the 7th Earl between the late 1840s and 1860, where once 100,000 pelargoniums were grown).

The 19th century garden, which did not greatly impinge on the earlier creation, covered seventy acres with ornamental beds, shrubberies, pools and fountains, an aviary and an eagery, but its centrepiece was without doubt the Great Conservatory, the second largest in the country. Built in London in 1853, it had Gothic-shaped windows domes in the Moorish style sixty feet high and was brought to Enville in kit form by barge, but was dismantled between 1928 and 1938, and only its platform and a single flue mark where it once stood remain.

The gardens became a great attraction when opened to the public, and at the height of their popularity attracted up to 6,000 visitors a week, who were no doubt entranced by a jet which rose to a height of 180 feet (or so it was claimed!) and the Great Conservatory. Sadly, they were closed within fifty years because of vandalism, a not-unfamiliar story, even in Victorian times (cf. The Wombourne Wodehouse), although this could not have compared to the damage the estate suffered at the hands of troops billeted at the Hall during



Shenstone's Chapel

World War II, when, amongst countless other depredations, the magnificent Seahorse Fountain, so-called because it was comprised of a horn-blowing Triton bursting out of the water flanked by seahorses, which was the centrepiece of the Ha-ha (or Seahorse) Pool, was blown to pieces by troops practising firing mortars!

At the conclusion of the visit, Jane described the tour as great fun and complimented the party on the interest and enthusiasm it had shown, easily generated, it should be said, when our guide was herself as highly knowledgeable and enthusiastic as Jane!

This was the third time the Trust had visited the Enville estate in tours led first by Sandy Haynes, Jane's predecessor as Estate Archivist, and then by Peter Williams, and its rich history and stunning landscape never fail to enthral.

(The substance of this article is based on the commentary Jane gave during the course of the visit, augmented by reference to "A History of the Eighteenth Century Gardens at Enville Hall" by Sandy Haynes, published in "The Ferme Ornée: Working with Nature": the Proceedings of the Association of Gardens Trusts Annual Conference held at Priorslee Hall, Telford, on 4th-6th September 1998 and published by the SGPT; "Enville", an overview by Historic England (in which Enville is listed Grade II); "Sanderson Miller and His Landscapes" by Jennifer Meir; "Staffordshire" by Timothy Mowl & Dianne Barre in the "Historic Gardens of England" series); and "A description of Hagley, Envil and the Leasowes, wherein all the Latin inscriptions are translated and every particular beauty described. ..." by Joseph Heely, dated 1777. Illustrated from photographs taken by C. J. Brown and the Editor).*

HODNET HALL

“THAT RARE ACHIEVEMENT, A GARDEN THAT ALWAYS HAS SOMETHING TO ENJOY”*

The present Hodnet Hall is the third on the site; originally, this was occupied by a twelfth-century Norman castle, which stood close to the main car park. It was replaced by a sixteenth-century timber-framed Tudor mansion house, whose site is now occupied by the Camellia Garden; only the stable block now stands, in use today as the restaurant.

In turn, this was replaced by the nineteenth-century neo-Elizabethan red-brick house, reduced in size in the 1960s, which occupies a commanding position on a flat south-facing plateau from which the distant South Shropshire Hills can be viewed.

The garden the visitor now sees is the vision and creation of Brigadier A. C. W. Heber-Percy, father of the present owner, Algernon Heber-Percy, who, beginning in 1922, started the challenging task of converting a marshy hollow in front of the house into a sixty-acre garden of stunning beauty which delights visitors whatever the season.

By building a series of dams, Brigadier Heber-Percy created a chain of seven lakes at different levels which formed the central axis of the garden which he planted out with rare trees and bog plants.

Until then, the garden had been limited to a single terrace to the south of the Hall and a small formal garden to the west.

Now covering sixty acres, this is truly a garden for all seasons: from April, the first magnolias, rhododendrons and camellias bloom, carpeted by daffodils, and narcissi, in turn to be followed by azaleas, clematis, wisteria, laburnum and peonies as Spring gives way to Summer.

As the year progresses, hydrangeas, agapanthus, euphorbia, fuschia and acers make their contribution to the beauty of the garden.

There is no place in this brief article for a catalogue of all the plants and shrubs which go to make Hodnet Hall a Mecca for garden-lovers; suffice to say that, at any time between May and September, it offers

horticultural delights which will enthrall any visitor.

Michael Faarup, describing the visit, writes, “Members congregated in the car park on a cool and breezy day as the sun emerged from the clouds, and continued to shine for the duration of the visit, greatly adding to the enjoyment of the gardens. Members were informed that the guide who had been expected to accompany members would not be able to do so for personal reasons, so members used the maps and their in-built compasses to explore the grounds together. No other visitors were present, so members had the gardens to themselves, which was a joy “We felt privileged to have our own private party on a day when the garden was not open to the public, enjoying the magnificent spring flowers and blossoms to ourselves and walking the woodland walks beside the chain of lakes. The kitchen garden was immaculately laid out, and we met the proud young lady responsible for its planting and upkeep. Many varieties of vegetables were planted and sown at

the beginning of the season.” John Hyde, who also took part in the visit, adds, “The gardens enjoy a sunny location, which evidently brought all the plants out of the winter sooner than in the surrounding area. In particular, members were able to enjoy the magnolia, camellia, azalea, rhododendron and many other plants as they either peaked or came to an end of their spring blossom. The dry winter and spring had kept the gardens, woods and lawns mud free, which added to the enjoyment of the visit. The gardens, paths and surrounding grounds are maintained to the highest standards.”

Members unable to take part in this visit but still wishing to visit the garden should consult its website to note the days when it is open to the public. They are sure to be delighted as well as impressed by what is nothing less than one man’s gift to successive generations of garden lovers.

**Barbara and Alan Palmer, “Some Shropshire Gardens”, Shropshire Books, 1980.*



Hodnet Hall

“An Undervalued Park which should be better known...”

...these are the words of Dr. Dianne Barre, who, following the formal business of the Trust's Annual General Meeting, gave a most interesting and entertaining talk on the development of Ingestre Hall's gardens and park. Describing the park as “very sophisticated”, she suggested that this was because it had all but vanished and was no longer recognised as an eighteenth-century park.

She began her talk by tracing its early history, beginning with Walter Chetwynd, who, in the years following the English Civil Wars of the seventeenth century, laid out formal gardens around the house. While Michael Burgers' engraving of Ingestre Hall which appeared in Robert Plot's “The Natural History of Staffordshire” in 1686 provided the first known illustration, it is thought to have over-simplified the design, though it shows an enclosed forecourt in front of the house divided into four lawns featuring obelisks and statuary, and in each of the two furthest corners “a little house” like summer houses “with towers and balls on top”.

The engraving also shows a second enclosed garden to the north side of the Hall, that is, on the side opposite to the church, similar in style, divided into a pattern of lawns with an axis punctuated by three circular beds, each with statues on plinths. Celia Fiennes, who visited Ingestre on one of her many journeys covering the length and breadth of England (and who is quoted above), also describes a summer house which gave access to a bowling-green and fish ponds. Beyond the bowling-green was “a very fine wilderness with many large walks of a great length, full of all sorts of trees”.

In the years which followed, classical buildings were added to the Wilderness, and the formal walks were now terminated by a pavilion, rotunda and tower, making what was thought to be the first sequence



The South Front viewed from Brown's landscape

of classical garden buildings in the county. Now only the pavilion remains in situ and is leased to The Landmark Trust, which, following restoration, runs it as a holiday

let, while the Rotonda has been relocated and is now to be found in the neighbouring village of Tixall. Of the Tower, only the foundations remain, shrouded in woodland



The Orangery interior before restoration



The Orangery interior after restoration



The Orangery before restoration



The Orangery after restoration

and barely accessible, having been abandoned and finally demolished following a family tragedy in which a gamekeeper killed himself and his family with a shot-gun.

By 1743 the garden had become old-fashioned in appearance; and much of the formal terracing around the house was removed. This burst of activity was in part driven by a falling-out with Robert Walpole, the de facto Prime Minister, as the result of which Walter Chetwynd, grandson of the Walter who built the Hall, having lost favour and influence at court, had withdrawn to his estate, enriched by the South Sea Bubble, (unlike many unfortunate investors)

and focussed his energies on its improvement.

Brown was commissioned to 'naturalise' the Wilderness by removing many of the trees and replacing them with open grassland, thus opening up the view, and softening the rigidity of the walks by making them more sinuous. However, he did not add one of his more distinctive signature features, a lake, the only water feature other than fountains to be added to the gardens later being a small canal, subsequently filled in. The classical buildings, including the Pavilion, already in place when Brown arrived, remained.

He was involved with the estate until the 1760s, in that time employing seventy men clearing the woodland close to the house over just one year. However, this was not one of his more lucrative commissions, for he received only two payments, one of £100 and the other £200, which may suggest that he was not present to supervise much of the work. Brown was followed by another iconic landscape designer, William Emes, and, by 1789, the formal gardens around the house had been replaced by lawns. However, in the early years of the following century formal gardens were restored around the house, and John Nash commissioned to design a new garden front in the Jacobean style. The garden itself was planted with a French-style parterre infilled with coloured gravel.

Yet another iconic figure may have been involved at Ingestre; a letter from Humphry Repton survives in which he asks to be allowed to pay a visit.

A more spectacular addition was the Orangery,[†] designed by James "Athenian" Stuart and built by Samuel and James Wyatt, its design almost exactly replicating that of the Orangery built at Blithfield Hall in about 1769. Until recently, it was believed that Blithfield's Orangery was built the following year, but the absence of any map before 1839 showing the Orangery and the facts that the bricks used are of the slightly larger size used in the 19th century than those used in the 18th have caused some experts to think that the Orangery may have been built some fifty years later than the previously accepted date.

The approach to the Orangery was down the Long Walk, still a striking feature of the gardens.

The ownership of the Ingestre estate passed to the Talbot family, later Earls of Shrewsbury, when Catherine, daughter (and heiress) of Walter, the second Viscount Chetwynd, who married John Talbot, and their son, another John, inherited

the Ingestre estate on the death of his mother. The Chetwynd- Talbots, as the family became known, remained in possession of Ingestre until the 1960s, when the estate was split up and sold, the Hall being purchased by West Bromwich Borough Council, now Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, who run it as an arts centre and wedding venue.

† It was in the newly-restored Orangery that The Trust held its Annual General Meeting, the first organisation to enjoy its new facilities.

Listed Grade II by English Heritage, it was brought back from its neglected state by a band of volunteers, who, in 2012, seeing its potential as a community asset, formed The Friends of Ingestre Orangery, raising over £1.5m. to restore it to its former glory.

While the original building provides well-lit space for social events such as the lunch which followed the formal business of the AGM, a 'pod' which is linked, but not attached, to it provides additional covered space for a kitchen, toilets, storage and meetings and, as on the afternoon of the AGM, the talk on the history of Ingestre by Dianne Barre, reported above.

The Orangery is now a Trust administered by four Trustees, whose Chairman, Aaron Chetwynd, himself a professional architect who contributed substantially to the design of the 'pod', was our host



This article is based on a talk given to the Trust by Dr. Dianne Barre at the Trust's Annual General Meeting held in the Orangery, Ingestre, augmented by reference to "Staffordshire" by Timothy Mowl and Dianne Barre.

(In "The Historic Gardens of England" series), and "A Short History of Ingestre" by Dr. Anne Andrews. Illustrated from photographs taken by C. J. Brown and Editor.

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