

Newsletter of the
Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust.
Registered Charity No. 1013862.
Company No. 2723974
WINTER 2019 ISSUE No. 61

Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

Published by the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust.



“A Good Example of a Late Victorian Park”

The year’s programme ended with a talk on the restoration of Hanley Park given by Claire Studman, one of the park’s liaison officers, with responsibility for public engagement.

Her particular remit is to organise family and community events, to entertain school groups, to engage through social media and to give presentations such as the talk she was giving to the SGPT.

Claire began by stressing the central location of the park – just ten minutes’ walk from Stoke-on-Trent’s railway and bus stations. At twenty-four hectares, one of the largest of Victorian parks, and listed Grade II* by English Heritage, it was opened in two phases, the first, known as the Cauldron Ground, in 1894, the second three years later. It was designed by Thomas Mawson, garden designer, landscape architect and town planner, who, in 1923, became the first President of the Town Planning Institute and, six years later, first President of the Institute of Landscape Architects. He also designed Burslem Park, opened only a month after the opening of the first phase of Hanley Park.

The park was laid out on waste land littered with detritus from the pottery industry, the work being carried out by unemployed pottery workers laid off during a period of industrial inactivity. Mawson’s first impression of the site was not favourable; he feared that any vegetation planted there would not thrive because of the air pollution generated by the potteries; and he regarded the busy Cauldon Canal, which cut through the site and had been laid down a century before to carry materials and product to and from the factories, as an eyesore which he took



The Pavilion, prior to restoration



The Lake



The Hammersley Fountain before restoration

steps to conceal by building a wall.

The work of restoring the park, long under-funded, was made possible by a Heritage Lottery grant of £4.5m, to which the City Council added a further £1.3m.

It began in 2015, and most of the restoration work has now been completed; the metalwork of the historic gates has been cleaned and re-painted, the canal bridges restored, and the brickwork of the perimeter walls repaired. A complete renovation of the main pavilion, which once housed two reading rooms, one for the men, the other for women, has been carried out, and it will open as a restaurant in March 2020.

Rowing boats and canoes will appear on the Lake, and the Boathouse, which will be divided into two community rooms, will also serve as a café and made available for wedding receptions. The two porter's

lodges have been restored and will shortly be made available for leasing.

Undoubtedly an outstanding feature of the park, the Hammersley Fountain is once again in working order, its basins having been used as flower beds in recent years. Its restoration, by Aura Conservation, a Stockport-based company skilled in restoring terracotta, was greatly assisted by members of the public, who were able to provide photographs of it dating back to 1930 showing it in its former glory. The four water-spouting dragons which for many years once graced the fountain but had long since disappeared have been replaced.

Already popular with runners and walkers (with or without dogs!), the park will soon have offered its visitors a wide range of leisure activities, physical and cultural. These will include tennis courts, a bowling green, an all-weather sports court, basket-

ball hoops and play areas for children, as well as concerts in the newly-restored bandstand.

At present, the venue for a wide range of events, it will continue to develop physically - and mentally - stimulating activities for all ages and abilities, supported by a team of community park rangers and an army of volunteers.

A link has already been established with neighbouring educational establishments such as Staffordshire University and Stoke College, and there have been studies arising from placements, both sociological and environmental.

Already, the park attracts a million visitors each year, a number which, it is hoped, will increase to at least 1.4 million. Local interest will be stimulated by Heritage Days, which will focus on the history of both City and Park, and, to that end, local residents are being encouraged to contribute aural reminiscences and written and photographic record to a data base. To maintain the steady flow of revenue necessary for the Park's future, a Financial Manager is to be appointed, whose remit will be to look for commercial opportunities and other forms of funding, a task in which he is sure to be assisted by an already active Friends of Hanley Park.

A guided tour of the Park led by Claire is already part of the Trust's 2020 programme, scheduled for October, but, before then, there will be a formal opening ceremony to mark the conclusion of the restoration; any members who might like to be present should keep an eye on the Park's website.

As pressure grows on land and housing density has increased, as gardens become minute and gardening is being reduced to the management of window boxes, The rôle of public parks and open spaces in supporting physical and mental well-being is being increasingly recognised by local authorities, and Stoke-on-Trent's investment in Hanley Park is to be welcomed and applauded.

(This article is based on Claire's talk, with additional detail taken from various websites)

Middleton Hall

A thousand years of history

The Trust's 2019 programme of visits ended in early October when a party of members and friends (amongst whom we were delighted to welcome Jane Roberts, Head Gardener at Dove Cottage, in Grasmere, and an active member of the Cheshire Gardens Trust) visited Middleton Hall, just outside Tamworth.

Middleton Hall's long history has tangible form in the complex of buildings, which date from the thirteenth century, though, even then, they do not record the full history of the estate, where, in 1977, a golden torc dating from 75 BC was discovered, suggesting that the estate had been settled much earlier. However, the oldest part of the Hall still standing is the Stone Building, which dates from 1285 and is thought to be the oldest domestic building in Warwickshire.

The manor of Middleton is mentioned in the Domesday Book, when, following its seizure from its Saxon lords, its owners are recorded as being Hugh de Grandmesnil,

who had commanded the cavalry at the battle of Hastings, and his wife Adeliz. Subsequently, after two centuries, ownership passed to the Willoughby family and remained in that family's possession for the next five hundred years.

It was Sir John Willoughby who, in about 1530, built the timber-framed Jettied Building, so-called because the first floor juts out over the ground floor. Restored in 2003, its appearance has not changed since Elizabeth I visited the Hall in 1575, save that the windows are now glazed whereas, at that time, they would have relied on wooden shutters to keep out the drafts.

Nowadays, the best known of the Willoughby family is, without doubt, Francis Willoughby (who preferred to be known by the earlier version of the family name of "Willughby"), 'the unsung hero of ornithology', who, with his ex-tutor and friend, John Ray, set about compiling an encyclopaedia of birds, describing, illustrating, classifying and grouping them in what was the earliest system in the science of taxonomy which would influence the work of Carl Linnaeus more than half a century later.

Published by Ray after Willoughby's premature death at the age of thirty-five, it was intended as the first of three volumes, the other two



Middleton Hall



The Moat



The Walled Garden

being on fish and insects, which were completed by Ray.

Over the next decades John Ray's reputation grew, not least because he lived until he was seventy-seven, while Francis Willughby's faded into near obscurity. In his lifetime Ray, who lived at Middleton from 1666 till 1676, published several pioneering works on plants, in which he employed a method of classification which formed the basis of modern taxonomy.

The ten years that Ray lived at Middleton are now commemorated in the John Ray Building, which dates from 1647 and is built on the

foundations of an earlier medieval building. It was further extended in the nineteenth century.

It was in this building that John Ray had his suite of rooms where he compiled the first significant catalogue of British plants and completed the scientific treatise which he had begun with Francis Willughby while tutoring his children.

Perhaps the most impressive architectural feature at Middleton is the Great Hall with its magnificent Grand Staircase added in the 1770s and now providing brides who choose Middleton Hall as their wedding venue with the most

spectacular of entrances!

Beyond the moat is the Grade II* listed Tudor Barn, dating from 1604, but, like the John Ray Building, standing on the foundations of a much earlier building. The courtyard behind the barn which once housed the stables and dairy now accommodates craft shops and a tearoom, added attractions for present-day visitors.

It was not, however, the buildings which were the focus of our visit, though we were given ample time and opportunity to visit them later in the afternoon, and after an introductory talk on the history of the estate by volunteer Jane Sutton,

preceded by a welcoming hot drink, the party set out on a guided tour of the garden and grounds led by Paul Martin, the head gardener.

The tour began at the West Lawn, a grassed area since Georgian times, which once stood at what was the front of the house, then approached across the present fields through an oak-lined avenue, which still survives. To one side, what is known as the Sunken Garden was once part of the moat which at one time completely surrounded the Hall. It was partially filled in so that a ha-ha could be dug to discourage incursions from deer which grazed the parkland beyond. Further infilling was to leave the moat on just two sides of the Hall, as it is today.

In time, the Sunken Garden, which still occasionally floods, will be planted with appropriate plants.

During the draining of the moat prior to in-filling, an unexpected tragedy was revealed when the remains of an armoured knight and his horse were uncovered. He was identified as Sir Edward Willoughby, uncle of Sir Francis Willoughby, who, riding away from the Hall after delivering to its residents the news of the inconclusive outcome of the Battle of Edge Hill (fought between Warwick and Banbury in October 1642) is believed on what was a foggy night to have inadvertently ridden into the moat, where he and his horse lay concealed by its depth and murkiness for centuries. His remains were interred in Middleton's Parish Church, where his gauntlet and helmet are on display.

A less dramatic exposure was that of a Second World War Anderson Shelter!

From there we proceeded to the Glade, an arboretum planted between 1860 and 1900, whose trees, which include a Wellingtonia, a cedar deodar and a monkey puzzle, reflect the Victorian's love of trees, especially new species. At the far end of the Glade stand the foundations of an eighteenth-century heated orangery,



The Herb Garden

demolished in 1820 and replaced by a wooden conservatory which also served as a venue for entertainment (Amongst the Hall's archive is a photograph showing a performance of "The Mikado" in front of a sizeable audience of invited guests).

Beyond, an orchard replaces an extensive flower garden, planted by Ernestine de Hamel, wife of Ernest de Hamel, tenant from 1886 till 1924, under the influence of her friend Gertrude Jekyll, and where there were once herbaceous borders there are now a wide variety of heritage fruit trees (Ernestine was the friend of Agnes Baden-Powell, Robert Baden-Powell's younger sister, and is credited with sharing with Agnes the authorship of "How Girls Can Help Build Up the Empire", the first handbook for the Girl Guides).

The party did not venture along the wooded Nature Trail, home to wide variety of birds, bats, moths and amphibians, but paused before Middleton Pool, whose modest name belies its eighteen acres. Reputed to be the largest man-made lake in Warwickshire, it was constructed in about 1590 in order to power a water-wheel for a blast furnace when manufacturing was one of Middleton's industries before it became dedicated to agriculture.

In Victorian times its surface was covered with white water lilies which were gathered and sent to Covent Garden, to be used as centre-pieces in the capital's hotels.

From there we entered the Walled Garden. Its hollow walls once allowed hot air generated by a coal-fired stove to circulate, enabling fruit

trees to be grown on either side of the wall. Constructed in 1717, it is one of the earliest examples of its kind in the country.

Its primary purpose was to provide produce for the house, but plants may also have been grown for household and medicinal use.

In Victorian times there was also within the Walled Garden a large heated greenhouse in which vines were grown, and in the twentieth century a tomato house was added, thus overcoming the long-held belief that tomatoes were poisonous!

Heated walled gardens lost favour as glasshouse technology improved and glasshouses proved less expensive to run and allowed the growing season to be extended. Peaches could also be grown.

An unusual feature within the Walled Garden is the Bothy built into one its corners. Bothies provided limited accommodation for under-gardeners, but this bothy is unusual in being two-storied with windows on the first floor giving views into garden and into the grounds beyond. This has given rise to the belief that it may have been intended for the family to use as a view point., a belief given support by its later re-designation as "The Pavilion" when it was listed Grade II* by English Heritage.

Close to the entrance stands one of Middleton Hall's most impressive trees – a mulberry tree which is at least two hundred years old and may be even older.

A walled enclosure within the Walled Garden, known as the Small Walled Garden, once housed a variety of workshops whose industry was vital to the smooth running of an estate but now contains a herb garden in which a variety of herbs used for culinary, medicinal and domestic purposes are grown in raised beds.

Members would have taken away so many impressions from this visit, but surely not the least of them would have been a deep



admiration of the commitment of so many volunteers ready to give of their time and talents to save this richly historic site from the ravages of neglect, a commitment which has extended over nearly half a century and continues to this day and for which countless visitors should be grateful (When the writer returned to Middleton Hall shortly after the Trust's visit, no fewer than six volunteers were at work in the Walled Garden, providing invaluable support to Paul, Middleton's only professional gardener, in place only since March).

The Trust is especially grateful to Jane Sutton and Paul Martin, who gave up part of their weekend to provide the Trust with such a fascinating visit, and to Amy Evans, who arranged the visit on a Saturday afternoon,

notwithstanding that the Hall usually entertains such visits in midweek.

Members unable to join us for this visit are strongly advised to include a visit in their own programme of visits in 2020.

(This article is based on the commentaries given by Jane Sutton and Paul Martin in the course of the Trust's visit, augmented by reference to two publications by the Middleton Hall Trust - "Middleton Hall: The History Guide", Deborah Gordon & Rehana Firth, and "Middleton Hall: The Garden and Grounds Guide").

“Not a garden, but a series of gardens”

Visited by the Trust in May, Spetchley Park, three miles east of Worcester, came into the ownership of the Berkeley family, who also own Berkeley Castle, in Gloucestershire, the scene of Edward II’s brutal murder, in 1605, when it was bought by Rowland Berkeley, a wealthy banker and merchant.

The moated Tudor mansion which then stood on the site was burnt down during the English Civil War, and the present house was not built until 1811, the family living in the intervening years in the converted stables.

Palladian in style, it was designed by John Tasker, who, like the Berkeleys, was a Catholic, and who worked mainly for his co-religionists. It overlooks a deer park, the home of red and fallow deer., in which there are some Cedars of Lebanon, believed to have been grown from seed brought back from Lebanon and therefore amongst the earliest grown in this country.

Edward Elgar, a native of Worcestershire, who was born at Broadheath and lived for a time at Kempsey, both villages, like Spetchley, close to Worcester, was a frequent visitor, and and enjoyed fishing in the Garden Pool; he is said to have been inspired to write part of his oratorio “The Dream of Gerontius” by the sound of the wind whistling through the pine trees at Spetchley.

Had the Germans launched a successful invasion of Great Britain in 1940,

Winston Churchill and his Cabinet would have retreated to Spetchley Park, but their air force was defeated in the Battle of Britain, and instead the Hall became a hospital for convalescing US airmen, for whom a baseball court was laid out on the front lawn. Spetchley’s association with the war-time Prime Minister is commemorated by an oak grown from an acorn brought from Blenheim Palace shortly after his death.

Another historical figure associated with Spetchley Park is the seventeenth-century diarist John Evelyn. A renowned silviculturist and author of “Silva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees and The Propagation of Timber in His Majesty’s Dominion”, published in 1662, and regarded as one of the first and most influential books published on forestry, he advised on the laying out of the landscape which now surrounds the house and gardens. It is he who has been credited with bringing back the seeds of the Cedars of Lebanon growing in the deer park.

The gardens, which members of the Trust visited in June (after a stop for lunch at Worcester) are principally the work of the celebrated plantswoman,

Ellen Willmott, and her sister Rose, the wife of Robert Valentine Berkeley.

Both were renowned horticulturists, but Ellen’s reputation greatly surpasses that of her sister’s. Ellen, generously described by Gertrude Jekyll as “the greatest of all living gardeners”, is said to have cultivated more than 100,000 species and cultivars of plants and flowering shrubs, as well as sponsoring plant-hunting expeditions to China and the Middle East to search for new species.

At one time she owned gardens at Great Warley, in Essex, Aix-les-Bains, in France, and Ventimiglia, in Italy, and employed over a hundred gardeners.

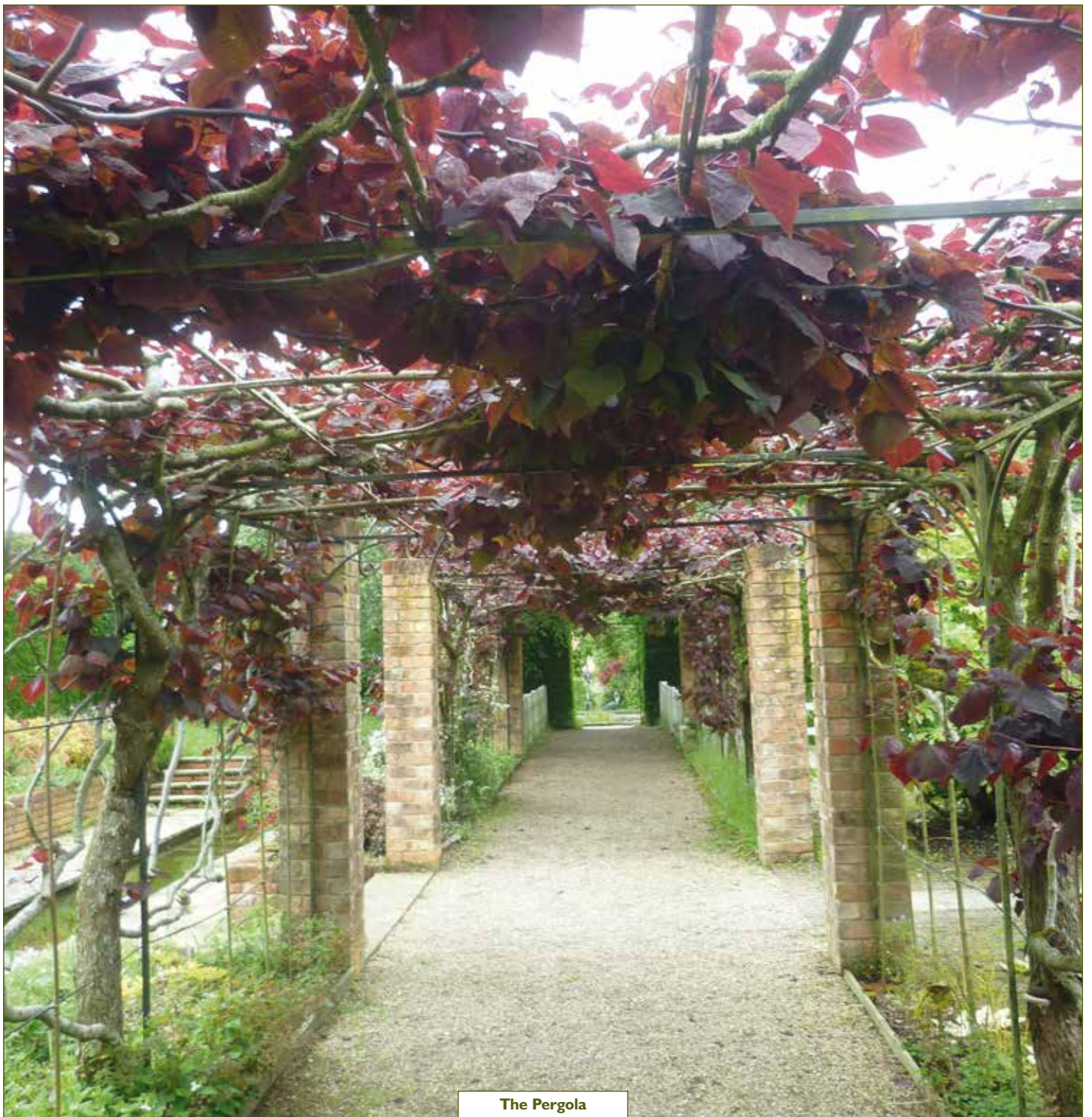
However, Spetchley has been rightly described as “not a garden, but a collection of gardens”, which offers visitors an almost overwhelming variety of colours and fragrances. A series of ‘compartments’, some enclosed, others open, host a wide range of flowers, shrubs and trees and an introduction to exotic plants and trees from different parts of the world – South America, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico, South Africa, China...and Cornwall.



The Rise Lawn



The Dipping Pool



The Pergola

The impressive South Border, one of the four borders which encompass the Walled Garden and the longest in the garden at a length of 370 feet and a width of 16, is planted with a variety of herbaceous flowers, including geraniums, asters, lupins, phlox, peonies and delphiniums, as well as a collection of fifty irises. The Fountain Gardens, which leads from it and is so called because of the fountain which stands at its centre, is divided into four quarters enclosed by yew hedges each in turn divided into a series of smaller beds, each of which was originally planted with a single botanical family. Today, this scheme is no longer followed, however, and, instead, the beds are now

planted with many species of magnolia and flowering tree peonies, below which alliums, daphnes and sweet-scented viburnum flourish.

The Walled or Kitchen Garden, which the South Border runs alongside, stands on what was once the orchard. It is enclosed within four walls which are not, as a first glance might seem, rectangular, but trapezoid, the south wall being longer than the north in order to catch the sun. A Peach House once stood against the north wall, but all that now remains are a number of stones, painted white to catch the sun. A few of the espaliered apple trees that once lined the paths still remain.

At the centre of the garden is what is now known as the Heron or Ducking Pool. Now ornamental, it was once the sole source of water for the garden when it produced vegetables and fruit for the house and flowers for sale at the roadside. Two other features capture the attention of the visitor, the bronze Ramsay Stag, one of a limited edition which has stood in the garden since 2008 and the other the rare ruby-coloured *Cercis canadensis* (or Forest Pansy) which provides a canopy over the pergola running above one of the paths.

The gardens at Spetchley Park continue to develop. The most recent addition is the Millennium Garden, an enclosure laid out in a corner of the Walled Garden in the 1990s and planted with a variety of sub-tropical plants with a fountain at its centre and a sunken rill running along one side, fed from a lion's head inlet and separated from the rest of the garden by a hedge.

In addition to its vast variety of flowering plants and shrubs Spetchley Park has a collection of rare and unusual trees, including American swamp cypress, American Red Oak and an unusual weeping birch. In one corner of the Fountain Gardens stands the remarkable Serbian Spruce, tall and rocket-like in appearance, whose slender shape ensures that the region's heavy snowfall does not weigh down and break its branches.

The Cork Lawn is dedicated, as the name suggests, to a number of cork oaks, widely grown throughout the Iberian peninsula, where its bark is stripped and used in the manufacture of tiles and stoppers for wine bottles. Harvested only every nine years, the bark grows back and is an early example of a sustainable resource.

Also found in the Cork Lawn is a magnificent example of the non-deciduous Lucombe Oak, a cross between a Turkey Oak and a Cork Oak.

Another area dedicated to a single species is the Rose Lawn, whose seventeen beds are planted with hybrid roses which add their beauty to the garden throughout the summer, while, bordering the Garden Pool, which is, in fact, a lake of substantial size and

a prominent feature viewed from the south front of the house, the New Lawn Arboretum is planted with a large collection of rowans and several species of willow.

Visitors to Spetchley in the spring will also be able to enjoy a display at the centre of Arboretum of the daffodil *Narcissus spetchley* bred by Rose Berkeley.

In contrast to the ever-changing appearance of the flora dictated by the changing of the seasons there are also some impressive permanent features.

In the South Border stands the Alcove, or Doric Temple, built, like the house, in Bath stone by Ellen Willmott in memory of Rose. Around its frieze are inscribed melancholy words from the Rubaiyat of



The Root House

the Omar Khayyam. Chosen by Robert, Rose's widower, the inscription reads: "The Moon of Heav'n is rising once again. How oft hereafter rising shall she look through this same Garden for me in vain!"

Alongside a path at the side of the Rose Lawn may be found the Root House, built around the roots of elm trees and dating from the early part of the nineteenth century. The wooden bosses in the roof are of gnarled oak, and it was once glazed. A rare surviving example of rustic garden architecture, it is listed by English Heritage.

Standing one side of the Rose Lawn, the Victorian conservatory, which still retains its original boiler, awaits restoration.

At the entrance to the Fountain Gardens the statues of the Shepherd and Shepherdess seem by their pose to be inviting visitors to enter. Known locally as Adam and Eve, they are copies of those cast by John Cheere, the eighteenth-century sculptor known for the lead statues he cast for gardens. His statues of the Shepherd and Shepherdess were particularly popular and can be found in many other gardens, notably Stowe, where they appear as "The Fruit Picker" and "The Gardener"!

The sheer extent of the garden and the seemingly infinite variety of flower plants, shrubs and trees within it make writing within the limitations of a short article which does justice to the expertise, the commitment and the dedication of those who created this garden a daunting challenge, one in which this writer has most certainly failed. The only remedy for the reader is to visit Spetchley Park and enjoy at first hand the delights which this horticulturist's paradise offers.

(This article draws on information taken from a number of literary sources including "The Gardens of Spetchley Park", by Mr. Berkeley (sic), "Spetchley Park Garden", by R. J. Berkeley, published in 1993, and "Spetchley Park: An Overview", published by Historic England, published in 1999).



On our visit we met one of the gardeners (we think!)



Part of the South Border, with Eve in the right foreground

Lichfield Cathedral's Festival of Christmas Trees

Once again, Lichfield Cathedral has been holding its annual Christmas Tree Festival.

Fifty-five real Christmas trees brightly decorated by schools, charities and businesses have been on display in the quire aisles, one of them decorated by three of our artistically-talented members.

The Festival, which each year attracts visitors from all over Staffordshire and the Midlands, was running from December 30th till January 5th, and we hope that many of our members brought their family and friends to admire this truly sumptuous display.



PETER HAYDEN

1928-2019

The Trust was saddened to learn of the death of Peter Hayden, one of its founder-members, in September.

Peter was born in Burslem. He was educated at Newcastle College and later read English at Bangor University, where he met his wife. During National Service, Peter was given an intensive course in Russian and appointed to an intelligence station intercepting Soviet communications. Returning to civilian life, Peter took up a post with the Nature Conservancy Council, near Peterborough, intending to make a career studying and managing the natural environment. In the event he was persuaded to return to North Staffordshire to manage the family business, a rôle he continued to play until its closure in the 1990s.

By the mid 1960s Peter began to expand his interest in visiting historic gardens into researching their history. He was an early and active member of The Garden History Society, the predecessor of The Gardens Trust, serving as Treasurer, then Chairman and latterly Vice-President. He contributed frequently to their journal, "Garden History", and other academic publications.

A particular interest was the parkland and gardens at Biddulph Grange, the future of which was uncertain

through much of the 1970s. Peter's detailed research, published in 1989 as "Biddulph Grange – A Victorian Garden Rediscovered", established the significance of the gardens leading in 1978 to their designation as a conservation area by the County Council and to inclusion at Grade I on the first Register of Historic Parks and Gardens published by English Heritage in 1984. Peter was very active, along with the late Keith Goodway, Basil Williams, of Manchester, and myself, in keeping public interest in the gardens alive through the 1970s with widespread lobbying, television interviews and even, to Peter's great excitement, the first depictions of an historic garden on a British postage stamp in 1978. After Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and The National Trust acquired the estate in 1982 Peter continued to work as an advisor and was a major influence on the subsequent restoration work.

Peter was an early convert to the new idea of county gardens trusts then being established in Hampshire and elsewhere, and championed the establishment of one for Staffordshire throughout the later

1980s. He was delighted when Barbara Juniper, landscape architect at South Staffordshire Council, persuaded her authority to give financial and administrative support to the formation of the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust, which launched in 1992. Peter served as a wise and knowledgeable member of the Trust's Council for a number of years.

Peter had an extensive knowledge of European gardens, in particular those in Russia. His publication in 2005 of the beautifully illustrated "Russian Parks and Gardens" is perhaps the definitive study of the subject in English. A regular visitor to Denmark, he translated his own work into Danish, a language in which he was fluent and from which he translated other garden writers into English and German.

Increasingly in his later years, Peter withdrew from public life as deafness made participation in meetings challenging. After the death of his wife, Peter was diagnosed with dementia and lived his final years at a nursing home in Audlem, dying peacefully in his sleep.

Officers of the Trust (2019/20)

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*The Trust is seeking a new Treasurer to succeed Michael Faarup when he stands down in January after four years of valued service in the role.

If any member would like to volunteer or to discuss the role, please contact the Chairman on alangtaylor@btinternet.com or the outgoing Treasurer on michael.faarup@btopenworld.com

Visit the Trust's website www.staffs.org.uk for information about the aims of the Trust, its activities and its publications, including past issues of the Newsletter.