

Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

Summer 2022 - ISSUE No. 65

News Letter



Milford Gates, an entrance currently shared by motorists, cyclists and pedestrians



“Shaping Shugborough”

The Trust opened its 2022 programme with an illustrated presentation by Hayley Mival, General Manager, and Caroline Beacall, Head Gardener and SGPT member, entitled **“Shaping Shugborough”**.

Once owned by the Bishops of Lichfield until the Dissolution of the Monasteries, it was the home to the Anson family from 1624 until it was gifted to The National Trust in 1966 in lieu of death duties following the death of the 4th Earl of Lichfield.

In turn, The Trust leased it to Staffordshire County Council for a period of ninety-nine years. However, pressures on the Council’s budget during the years of austerity led to a period of low investment, and, as a consequence, in 2016, the Council negotiated the return of the estate to The National Trust.

Following the transfer of the management of the entire estate to The National Trust, the Trust set about preparing a management plan designed to respond to the

pressures to which the estate was currently being subjected, the benefits of which are now being felt..

It was abundantly clear that the Ansons had bequeathed to the nation at large - and to Staffordshire in particular- a veritable treasure, both metaphorically and literally, to which two brothers, Thomas and George, had contributed enormously.

The younger brother, George, enjoyed a highly successful and lucrative naval career, rising to the rank of Admiral and being appointed First Lord of the Admiralty. During the course of his service one of his exploits was to capture a Spanish treasure ship, some of whose treasures can now be seen in the mansion.

Childless, he predeceased his brother, who consequently inherited the bulk of his wealth, which he used to extend the mansion and create the monuments in the parkland for which Shugborough is known and recognised in its Grade I listed landscape.



“...the car park occupies a central and dominant position”

The 900-acre estate is roughly triangular in shape, bounded to the south by the A513. The Trent Valley railway line and the Staffordshire & Worcestershire Canal both traverse the estate (the former hidden from view by a cutting and a 777-yard tunnel). The Staffordshire Way also runs through the centre of the estate.

The main entrance can be accessed at its junction with Milford Road. This entrance, which is not popular with the County Highway Authority, is currently shared by motorists, cyclists and pedestrians, and The National Trust is currently looking for an alternative, probably further back along the A51, where it would include a splayed entrance which would allow motorists to pull off the main road before entering the estate.

To make the estate financially viable, it would be desirable for the present level of footfall to increase substantially, yet this would result in increased pressures, not least on infrastructure, requiring improvements to visitor facilities.

There would be a need, too, to reduce the wear-and-tear on the more favoured walks by diversifying the currently limited options which confront visitors on arrival. At present, the car park occupies a central and dominant position in the landscape, encouraging visitors to follow a processional pathway towards the

mansion; consequently, there is a proposal to re-locate it on the far side of the Walled Garden in an area previously occupied by the Outdoor Education Centre. From here visitors would be given a wider choice over which direction to take.

Planning permission for the car park nearest the mansion has expired and will not be renewed.

It was suggested from the floor that the mansion presented a drab and uninviting appearance unlikely to draw visitors to it. This, Hayley said, was being addressed, but she also pointed out that experience at other properties such as Calke Abbey, where she had previously worked, showed that only a minority of visitors came to view the house, the rest preferring to remain in the parkland and to use the facilities (She estimated that only about 40% of visitors entered the mansion)

Generally speaking, the reasons for visiting Shugborough are two-fold, (while not necessarily being exclusive); while some come to learn about an iconic landmark which has played a significant rôle in the history of the county, many come in pursuit of exercise, taking advantage of the wide, traffic-free expanse of the parkland, often accompanied by their dogs. To that end, fencing erected to restrain stock has been removed and the landscape opened up.

The parkland also attracts cyclists; provision for cyclists is a feature of the management plan, so designated cycle routes will be laid down, and it will also be possible for visitors to hire cycles.

Conservation work on the monuments began with the restoration of The Triumphal Arch and The Tower of the Winds, now completed. The exterior of the Tower has been entirely re-painted after painstaking research had identified an authentic colour matching the original, and cracks filled, lead work repaired or replaced. Work on the garden walls is almost finished, with renovations on the farmhouse and the servants’ quarters starting in the middle of this year. In time, the Chinese House and the Lanthorn of Demosthenes will be renovated.

The view from the Doric Temple has been re-opened following the removal of rhododendron obstructing it.

The tennis court, where once Patrick Lichfield entertained his guests, is being set up to play tennis again, and its romantic setting, enhanced by the roses – including the appropriately-named Lichfield rose, which blanket the fence-line –, maintained. Outbuildings at the former Outdoor Education Centre would be removed or found a new use as, for example, visitor facilities.



The rose-lined tennis court



The Tower of the Winds

A major problem is severe flooding. Both the River Trent and the River Sow flow through the estate and are likely to flood low-lying areas after heavy rainfall. A remedy under consideration is to find ways of slowing the water-flow, while at the same checking the state of the drains and culverts.

Caroline, who manages the gardens, including The Walled Garden, formal gardens, pleasure grounds and arboretum, followed Hayley’s talk with a summary of a management plan for the gardens and parkland which had inevitably suffered a degree of neglect during the first lockdown, when voluntary labour had been unavailable (prior to the pandemic a team of 100 helped in the gardens), and badgers, foxes, rabbits and deer had made their home there!

“the Arboretum houses
Patrick Lichfield’s
collection of oaks”



In addition, the recent series of heavy storms had caused damage, especially Storm Franklin, in February of this year, which had caused the rivers to flood. More permeable material would be one solution to this problem.

Conversely, global warming means that plants will have to be more resilient to heat.

Caroline reminded us that the Ansons had a reputation as plant-hunters; the Arboretum houses Patrick Lichfield’s

collection of oaks, planted as acorns from all over the world (including The White House Lawn!), while 96 trees will be added to the three-acre Lady Walk as part of the Queen’s Green Canopy. The arrival of many new plant diseases such as Yew Needle Blight added to the need for constant vigilance.

Restoration work in the eight-acre Walled Garden had been taking place steadily over the years. More recently, the walls in its south section are undergoing repairs.

The new proposals to relocate the visitor facilities will see former paths and entry points crossing the ha-ha re-open, thus giving access to all areas of The Walled Garden. It will incorporate designs that work in harmony with nature and wildlife, that will respond to the changing climate, and which celebrate the unique character of the gardens in The Walled Garden. Orchards and a Forest Garden will be created.

The South Staffordshire Bee-keeping Association’s Apiary has been temporarily re-located from The Walled Garden to the paddock at The Kennels, which was where the estate’s Head Gardener once lived. The Apiary will return to The Walled Garden following the completion of the project work in a few years’ time.



*The impressive
Head Gardener’s
House, first
occupied in 1810
and abandoned
in the 1960s*

The ten-year master-plan will require substantial investment, which will mean drawing on reserves and energetic fund-raising. Grants have been received from BIFFA, the waste management company, and the HS2’s Community & Environment Fund.

At the heart of the restoration was the desire to empower visitors, that is, to enable them to explore the estate in any way they liked, to explore the landscape in their own way.

Certainly, SGPT members, many of whom are members of The National Trust as well, will follow developments with a keen interest after this absorbing presentation.



*The Apiary on its temporary site
at The Kennels*

SURVIVING THE COVID YEARS!

This year's Annual General Meeting was, by kind permission of its owner, Charles Hanson, held at Bishton Hall, Colton, on a sunny afternoon in mid-May. Originally intended to take place in the Orangery, it was decided to hold it outside in the more comfortable shade of a nearby tree!

The usual business of an AGM was transacted: apologies from absent members were received; the minutes of last year's AGM were approved; the Treasurer reported that the Trust's finances remained sound. The Trust had advised local planning authorities on a number of sensitive applications which impacted on historic landscapes.

Research had had to be put on hold because of the closure of the County Record Office and the William Salt Library while extensive building work was taking place.

The Trust had continued to publish a twice-yearly Newsletter, but in a new A5 format which had met with general approval.

After the Chairman had presented the report on the activities of the Council of Management (see Appendix), which had continued to meet by Zoom when face-to-face meetings had not been possible because of the pandemic, the meeting proceeded to the election to the Council. However, since no serving member had completed the two years limit, and there were no forthcoming candidates (which, unfortunately, left the Council with an unfilled vacancy), no elections took place.

Covid had resulted in a reduction in the number of visits which had been arranged (and seemed to have affected the usual numbers supporting the visits). There had, however, been a truly memorable visit in September to two Cotswold gardens – Bourton House, in the village of Bourton-on-the-Hill, and Kiftsgate Court, near Mickleton. Such out-of-the-County

visits were helpful, the Chairman believed, in giving members a sense of perspective and by opening a wider spectrum of sites.

One compensation for the absence of visits was the opportunity offered to members to take part in on-line lectures given by neighbouring Trusts. The standard of these talks had been very high, and members were strongly advised to take advantage of invitations from host Trusts to take part.

The Chairman then turned to the most significant item on the agenda: members had been sent a briefing paper with the agenda which set out details of a proposal to change the governance of the Trust from a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Charitable Trust to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Under the former, the Trust was required to submit an annual return and a report to three different organisations – The Charities Commission, Companies House and Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Though this arrangement limits members' liabilities in the event of insolvency, it was principally designed for large organisations, not for small, volunteer-run groups such as Gardens Trusts.

Consequently, the Trust's Council of Management has been looking at ways in which it could be relieved of this responsibility. Having looked closely at the alternatives available – Charitable Incorporated Organisation, Unincorporated Association and Charitable Trust – it has concluded that the first of these best suits the Trust's needs.

It would allow the Trust to continue to raise funds through membership

fees, donations, fees from visits and organising occasional conferences, while our current activities, such as planning visits to historic parks and gardens, arranging talks and maintaining an archive of documents and publications, all fit within the remit of a charity.

At the same time, members would no longer be liable for any debts the organisation might incur, nor would the Trust be penalised for any administrative error such as the late filing of accounts. The Trust would still be required to make an annual submission to The Charities Commission, however.

If the change were agreed it would be necessary to complete a new Constitution, which would then be submitted with an application to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Once the application had been approved by The Charities Commission, all the Trust's cash and property would have to be transferred to the new CIO and the Trust wound up and removed from The Charities Commission and Companies House.

After members had discussed the proposal, authority was given to Council to consider the matter further and, having decided on the preferred choice from the several model constitutions put forward by The Charities Commission, would submit it for the approval of members before making a formal application to the Commission.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed, and there followed a talk by the Chairman on the history of Bishton Hall.



Report of Council of Management 2022

After the hiatus of 2020, when much of the activity of the Trust was precluded by the COVID pandemic, the Trust was pleased to resume a cautious programme of garden visits, even if numbers able to attend were limited by ongoing public health restrictions. Some of these visits had been held over from 2020, including Hanley Park and Hartlebury Castle, but we were pleased to fit in additional meetings at Wollerton, near Market Drayton, Bourton and Kiftsgate in the Cotswolds, as well as the AGM at Blithfield. Our end-of-year meeting in November, held in person in Penkridge, was an entertaining talk on the recently completed Lottery Funded restoration of Victoria Park in Stafford. To compensate for the limited programme over the two years 2020-21 members' subscriptions were rolled forward, giving two years' membership for the price of one.

As mentioned in Council's report to the 2021 AGM, the Garden Trust movement, like so many other bodies, adapted to the new environment of restricted movement by adopting on-line formats for meetings and talks. This gave access to a very wide range of informative lectures and seminars across the country from the comfort of members' own homes, opportunities which might not have been possible had there been a need to travel. For a second year SGPT continued to share these opportunities with members.

Council met regularly on-line throughout the year and once in person. One issue of the Newsletter was published in the new A5 format. Discussions continued with other local groups about the possibility of setting up a research project, but no serious progress was made in this respect. With the closure of the County Record Office and William Salt Library for 18 months during building works this

project has been put on hold for the time being.

The Trust works with The Gardens Trust, the national overarching gardens conservation body for England and Wales, in commenting on planning applications. Five planning consultations were received: a major housing development affecting the setting of Beacon Park in Lichfield; two proposals for siting "shepherd's" huts as holiday accommodation in the park at Chillington; a new access proposal at Keele; the erection of a safety handrail at Biddulph Grange; and revisions to the conservation area boundary at Great Barr. Strong objections were raised to the proposals in Lichfield and at Biddulph Grange; the other proposals were considered either acceptable or acceptable subject to modest amendment.

The Trust's financial position remained sound in 2021, even though income was reduced because of the decision to defer renewal of subscriptions for the year. Income from other sources including charges for events helped meet the recurring costs of insurances, subscription to The Gardens Trust and funding the newsletter. The Trust has now moved most of its banking activity to an on-line model to save time in administration and avoid the bank handling charge of 50p per cheque. Most members already pay their subscriptions and the fees for visits on-line: those still paying by cheque are encouraged to make the transition.

As Chairman I would like to express my thanks to fellow members of Council who have worked tirelessly through the year. Their commitment and enthusiasm has ensured that the Trust has survived a challenging couple of years and is securely placed as the post COVID world opens up.

Alan Taylor
Chairman



BISHTON HALL, COLWICH

Our 2022 AGM was held at Bishton Hall, Colwich, by kind permission of Charles Hanson. Unfortunately, our invited speaker, who was going to talk about his research into the history of the house and pleasure grounds and the families who had lived there, was unable to attend. The following notes are therefore a very brief and incomplete account of what is known about the site: they have not been validated by access to original sources.

Bishton Hall is a grade II* listed building. It is a three-storey hipped-roof house of seven bays with central pediment above stucco or rendered elevations flanked by two later bow-fronted stone-built wings. The rear (garden) elevation is of painted brick. An extensive brick-built service range, originally limewashed and formerly comprising stables, coach-houses and a brew house, immediately adjoins the house to the west.

The Bishton estate was purchased from a branch of the Sneyd family circa 1770 by a John Sparrow. Some writers say he was a banker, others that he was a lawyer from Newcastle under Lyme and clerk to the Trent and Mersey Canal Company, where, inter alia, he worked in partnership with Josiah Wedgwood the potter. He is said to have rebuilt Bishton Hall soon after acquisition, but unless his design was very conservative for the period, it is more likely that he remodelled and extended a pre-existing 18th century house on the site. Sparrow was well respected in Staffordshire society, acting as Chairman of the Quarter Sessions for 25 years. He is reputed to have mixed with the leading intellectuals in the county, including members of the Lunar Society (so called because the club only met on nights when members could safely navigate home by the light of the moon), sharing information on the latest developments in philosophy, science, botany, horticulture and plant collecting. Wedgwood was a founder-member of the Society, making this association highly likely. Sparrow is said to have planted many exotic introductions to Great Britain in the pleasure grounds at Bishton.

The site is flat. Historically, it seems that the main entrance was along a carriage drive direct from Wolseley Bridge and then across Bellamour Lane into the present front drive. The gateway and track just by the canal bridge on the A51 remain, but the route seems to have fallen into disuse some time after 1900 (it was shown on early edition OS maps). The main entrance front looks across lawns, over a ha-ha concealing the lane to Colton, towards the River Trent and the adjoining Wolseley Hall park. Originally, the view encompassed an ornamental boathouse with a pedimented classical style portico on the bank of the river. This would have been cut off from the main part of the estate by the construction of the Trent and Mersey Canal close to the riverbank in the 1760s. At some point the superstructure was demolished: the stone columns of the portico (but not the pediment) were

salvaged and crudely attached off-centre to the end of the early 19th century orangery to the north of the house. The brick substructure and vaulted ceiling of the boathouse remain in situ.

To the east of the hall the lawns are divided by beds of rhododendron and terminated by a cast-iron rose arch flanked on one side by a yew hedge and on the house side by a row of topiary yew balls. The significance of this curious layout is not understood. Beyond, as far as the boundary ha-ha, is a screen belt of trees containing a pets' cemetery.

The piece de resistance of the grounds is the parterre garden to the north, a roughly square enclosure enclosed on three sides by stone parapet walls with a large multi-petal central basin in the centre. The north side is dominated by a central Doric-style temple raised on a platform and flanked by screen walls ending in smaller projecting pavilions. The

date of this imposing structure (now listed grade II*) is uncertain. Stylistically, it could have been erected circa 1800; some authorities suggest a date in the 1820s. The architect is equally unknown. The accomplished design (which is of a national rather than local quality) could be the work of Samuel Wyatt, who worked nearby at Shugborough and Sandon. Less likely is an attribution to James Trubshaw from the family of architect-builders of Great Haywood.

John Sparrow died in 1821. His widow Elizabeth and daughter Charlotte were keen gardeners and continued development of the grounds, receiving compliments on their work from contemporary commentators. Charlotte never married and lived at Bishton until she died aged 90 in 1876. Auction particulars of 1887 record the property as in the occupation of Edward Garrow-Whitby, about whom nothing is currently

known. The later history of the property is unclear at the moment, but in 1947 it was purchased by the Stafford-Northcote family, who ran a preparatory school there until 2018. Charles Hanson subsequently acquired the majority of the site (the large walled kitchen garden to the north-west was sold separately) and runs it as an antiques centre but with ambitions to restore the grounds and provide access for community activities. SGPT is supportive of this initiative and has offered its assistance to the project.

Although more research is needed, particularly to clarify the identity of John Sparrow and establish the architect of the Doric screen, it is already apparent that Bishton was an important site in the intellectual and horticultural worlds of the late 18th century and that this significance has not been fully appreciated before. We look forward to more revelations unlocking these mysteries.

AGT

The Doric Temple and flanking screen walls





The rose walk

“Thirty years on”

To celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, the Trust held an afternoon gathering at Blithfield Hall, the home of its President (and host) Commander Charles Bagot-Jewitt, DL.

The informal event included a look back at the Trust’s thirty-year history, a quiz on garden history prepared and presented by member Michael Faarup, and, after tea and cakes, the opportunity to be taken on a guided tour of the house, including the Great Hall, and a wander round the grounds.

The occasion was graced by the presence of three former Chairmen – Sarah Ashmead, Charles Jackson-Houlston and Dr. David Jacques -, two of whom gave talks on their time in office. Charles, a qualified architect and at one time Head of Sustainability at Wolverhampton City Council, had had a particular interest in historic gardens. A visit to Castle Bromwich Gardens, where he detected what he called ‘its sleeping quality’, had made him aware of the need for some sort of pressure group to arouse and promote an active concern for the future of such gardens, and consequently he had been a founder-member of the Trust.

He had identified three elements vital to the success of such an enterprise: people to form a membership; parks and gardens of historic interest; and owners who would allow their stewardship to be shared with others who were both knowledgeable and authoritative. He cited the Trust’s first President, Peter Gifford, owner of Chillington Hall, as a model President, who maintained a local interest (which manifested itself in ways such as taking pupils from local schools round the park) even while he was preoccupied in saving it from the being

degraded by having the M54 routed through it.

Another example of good stewardship was provided by Peter and Caroline Phillips, who inherited The Wombourne Wodehouse in the 1980s. They were without any experience, but nonetheless accepted the obligations which possession brought, sharing their grounds with the public and building up a stunning collection of bearded irises which is now one of the estate’s outstanding features.

The Trust was fortunate in having from its earliest days the support of two renowned scholars in the study of historic parks and gardens – Peter Hayden and Keith Goodway. Keith, whose background was botany, taught in the School of Biology at Keele University, and became an authority on the eighteenth-century landscape designer William Emes, who had designed the landscape at Keele Hall, around which the University had developed.

Peter, who had spent his time doing National Service as a Russian interpreter, became a published authority on Russian gardens and landscape. It was his research into its history that enabled The National Trust to save the unique Victorian gardens at Biddulph Grange. Peter had been especially pleased when, in 1978, Biddulph Grange was one of the gardens selected for an issue of stamps commemorating the nation’s historic gardens.

In the early days of the Trust, some of the region’s historic gardens were not generally open to the public; he had himself been involved in encouraging the owners of two of the most significant sites in the Midlands - Enville Hall and The Leasowes - to allow public access.

For many years, the Trust had been fortunate to have benefited from the administrative acumen of the late Jim Earle, who, as its Treasurer, ensured that the Trust continued on a sound financial footing.

In 2000 Charles was followed as the Chair by Sarah Ashmead, who, with her husband, Howard Price, had set up Ashmead Price Ltd., landscape designers. She recalled that, in those days, procedures had been conducted more formally; meetings of the Management Council were held in Stafford (nowadays, the existence of Zoom means that members of Council can avoid the inconvenience of making journeys through cold winter nights!).

Following the death of Peter Giffard, Patrick, Lord Lichfield, accepted the Trust's invitation to become its President, but, sadly, that arrangement ended after only three years, when Lord Lichfield died in November 2005.

Between 2000 and 2004, the Trust had gone through a shaky patch during which it was decided to re-vamp its corporate image, introducing a new logo and changing type face and colour, adopting an engraving of the urn at Keele.

The Trust's first banners were designed and included a digital map showing the locations of all Staffordshire's historic parks and gardens. In December 2003, Lois Hall, a member of the Trust, published her book on Staffordshire's walled gardens. Earlier, the Trust had published a booklet entitled "The Ferme Ornéé: Working with Nature", which recorded the proceedings of a conference on the topic organised by the Trust at Priorslee, in Shropshire, on behalf of The Association of Gardens Trusts in 1998.

An active Research Group had been

led by Sue Gregory, the Trust's Archivist, whose own researches made her the go-to authority on the history of Trentham Gardens. Using the Register Review for Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England as the basis of its continued research and study (as well as maps provided by the County Record Office and the William Salt Library), the Group had spent many days measuring and recording.

A major research project spear-headed by the Trust has been the restoration of a garden between the old library building (once a girls' school and now converted into flats) and the Lichfield University campus. An elongated U-shape, it was once part of the school where the girls were allowed to take gentle exercise. Years of toil led by members of the Trust saved it from dereliction and it is now, by permission of Pegasus Homes, open to the public.

In 2002, the Trust marked its tenth anniversary with a reception at Patshull Hall, where guests-of-honour included Gilly Drummond, of The Association of Gardens Trusts, and Peter Sales, of The National Trust.

In the final year of Sarah's tenure of office, the Trust organised a conference at Weston Park on the topic of veteran trees.

In bringing the meeting to a close, Alan, the current Chairman, struck a sombre note: while the Trust remained viable, its membership at about hundred, in line with the membership of Trusts of a similar size, and its financial position was sound, if it was to continue for another thirty years, it would always be in need of fresh blood, both in the ongoing recruitment of members and in members' readiness to offer their time to assist with administration and with the organisation of events.

STAFFORDSHIRE GARDENS AND PARKS TRUST - 30 YEARS

The Chairman's Address

ORIGINS

The Gardens Trust got started nationally in the mid 1980s in Hampshire, Kent and Sussex, but the idea of a trust to campaign for the protection of historic parks and gardens was being mooted in Staffordshire by the late Peter Hayden as early as 1978, when Peter, the late Keith Goodway and I were exploring setting up a Trust to take on management of Biddulph Grange gardens from the NHS. In the event, The National Trust became involved at Biddulph, and, while we continued to talk about a county-wide trust for Staffordshire, nothing material progressed. Our thinking was spurred in 1984, when, at very short notice, English Heritage asked for nominations for inclusion on the new Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Unlike our counterparts in Oxfordshire and Hampshire, who by then had newly-established trusts with ready-to-hand lists of local sights, Peter, Keith and I had to scabble our suggestions together over dinner one Friday night: the need for a Staffordshire Trust was evident.

With the lapse of thirty years I am rather unclear quite what happened next other than to say that by 1989 Barbara Juniper, then Landscape Officer for South Staffordshire Council, had become involved, and pulled together a steering group of interested persons who, with the help of the Council's solicitor, devised the constitution we still work to. The admin and behind-the-scenes support of South Staffordshire Council was invaluable and helped us through our first twenty years.

By 1992 the Trust was ready to roll and was formally launched one midsummer

evening in a ceremony on the lawns of Shugborough, encouraged by a rousing speech from Gilly Drummond, doyenne of the Gardens Trusts movement. Our first President was Peter Gifford, of Chillington Hall, and it is to Peter that we owe the order "Gardens and Parks" in our title rather than the more usual "Parks and Gardens" (don't ask me why!).

The new Trust got off to a brisk start beginning our regular programme of guided visits to sites not normally accessible to the public. Early visits included Wollerton, Heath House at Tean, and Rangemore, a former home of the Bass family, near Burton-on-Trent. Research and recording were high on our agenda in those days with a full-day training event for members at The Wombourne Wodehouse, assisted by staff from the newly-created Heritage Lottery Fund.

I well remember our recording day at Patshull; here, David Wright, of the County Council's forestry team, and a member of the Trust, introduced us to the technique of ageing trees by measuring their girth. Later, we held a widely-attended one-day conference looking at the future of trees in historic parks – a call to arms in the face of climate-change.

Planning matters exercised the Trust from the early days; our major cause célèbre was over the future of Trentham Gardens, when British Coal put the estate up for sale in 1995. Relief that the park had been bought as a single entity and not fragmented into diverse ownership was tempered when St. Modwen plc, better known for warehouse parks and land reclamation, was revealed as the new

owner, but, as we know, all turned out well in the end. Keith Goodway spoke for the Trust at the planning enquiry; Sue Gregory, the Trust's Archivist, undertook immense research into the history and significance of the estate, uncovering all manner of interesting insights, several of which helped inform the restoration programme.

Sadly, the youthful vigour and enthusiasm of the Trust began to dwindle after 2000. Many of the founder- and more expert members left the area; sadly, a few passed away, and regrettably the reservoir of expertise which had underpinned the early research work has, even now, not been replenished.

Nonetheless, the Trust has carried on. Our annual programme of visits remains as active and well supported as before, sometimes venturing well out of County. – I think of trips to The Laskett, in Herefordshire, Kiftsgate, in the Cotswolds, and tea with our previous President, The Lord Cormack, in The House of Lords.

Membership has remained stable around the 100 mark. This is somewhat less than Norfolk (700 members) or Hereford & Worcester (350), but in line with our near-neighbours in Shropshire and Warwickshire.

Our Newsletter has gone from strength to strength, evolving from a cyclostyled typed sheet to an A4 broadsheet and to the highly-professional-looking all-colour A5 format. Credit for this public face of the Trust must go to Bryan Sullivan, who has been our editor and often sole contributor through most of this period. We hope you find it an effective and enjoyable means of communication

I have attempted, as briefly as I can, to give an overview of the Trust's genesis and early development, but what of its future?

PART TWO – THE FUTURE

There remains a need for a body promoting research into and better understanding of the County's parks and gardens and in providing a critical commentary on planning applications affecting them.

It is clear from attendance at events that we have organised over the years that there is support for this rôle. We must continue to recruit new members to help show planners, politicians and landowners by sheer force of numbers that designed landscapes are held as important by the wider public. As a Trust we must foster continuing research into understanding these sites and help develop the skills among our members to participate in this work. And, of course, we will continue to enjoy visits to interesting, unusual and attractive parks.

But, if the first thirty years have been our formative period, I see the next ten years as being pivotal for the Trust. We are heavily, even unhealthily, dependent on the current six Trustees in running the Trust; indeed, at the moment our governing Council is operating below the quota required by the Constitution. None of us is getting any younger, and, by the law of Nature alone, we will not be able to continue indefinitely. I see a crunch point coming in the next decade as the present Trustees begin to retire: can the Trust survive? There is a solution – greater membership participation in running the Trust; as a well-known supermarket says: "every little helps"!

The future is in your hands!

(This article is a slightly amended version of the Chairman's address to members at the 30th Anniversary celebration – Ed.)

Congratulations!

The Trust sends its warmest congratulations to past Chairman and continuing member Dr. David Jacques, on his award of the OBE in the Queen's Jubilee Honours List for his long years of service to garden history and conservation.



As lecturer and writer, David has made an invaluable contribution to the recognition and understanding of the key rôle played by our historic gardens in the nation's cultural and political life.

Members will have the opportunity to hear David talk about his latest book, "Chiswick House and Gardens: 300 Years", at the Trust's final event of the year, to be held at The Haling Dene Centre, Penkridge, on Wednesday, November 23rd.

Saturday, October 15th:

A walk round Sandon Park.

The home of the Ryder family since the late 1770s (made Earls of Harrowby in 1809), the present Sandon Hall was rebuilt after a fire in 1850 and is Grade II* Listed.

The park, which covers 400 acres, contains monuments to two Prime Ministers, Spencer Perceval, who has the unfortunate distinction of being the only British Prime Minister to be assassinated while in office, and William Pitt the Younger, as well as The Trentham Tower, a folly brought from Trentham Hall (where it formed part of the roof) when the Hall was



demolished at the beginning of the last century, and re-erected at the highest point of the park.

The walk, which will start at 2.00 pm, will be led by our Chairman, Alan Taylor.

Sandon Hall is five miles from Stafford. Its entrance is off the A51 at Sandon Village.

Its postcode is ST18 0BY.

Further details will be sent to members nearer the date of the visit, together with a booking form.



*Topiary in the formal garden
Bishton Hall*

OFFICERS OF THE TRUST (2022/23)

President: Charles Bagot-Jewitt

Chairman: Alan Taylor

Treasurer: Francis Colella

Membership Secretary: John Hyde

Newsletter Editor: Bryan Sullivan

Editorial Advisor: Richard Sullivan*

Website Manager: Julie Hall

Company Secretary: Catherine Thorpe

Members of Council of Management:

Alan Taylor (Chair)

Francis Colella

Michael Faarup

Julie Hall

John Hyde

Bryan Sullivan

**ex-officio*

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.

This Newsletter is published by Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust