

Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

News Letter

WINTER 2020 - ISSUE No. 62



A message from our Chairman

No doubt historians will, in time, come up with a succinct description of 2020. For those of us who have experienced it, indeed, still are experiencing its strangeness any number of adjectives seem applicable: unusual, difficult, alarming, dangerous, challenging spring to mind among the more optimistic vocabulary: other darker, sadder terms also menace. From the Chair I hope that you and your families have got through the year unscathed by the nastier excesses of the virus and its social impacts.

For the Trust it has been a frustrating time. We had arranged a full and interesting programme of activities for members; indeed, we had just held our first visit, a well-attended opportunity to see the valley gardens and newly restored conservatory at Alton Towers when the national lockdown struck. Even at that time it seemed unlikely that "normal" life would return in 2020, so Council took the decision to cancel all activities for the year and roll the remaining programme forward to the nearest equivalent date in 2021. Details of the updated programme which includes some new destinations are given elsewhere in this Newsletter. We are keeping fingers crossed that the public health situation will have eased sufficiently by then to enable the visits to happen. We also took the decision to carry 2020 subscriptions forward into 2021, giving members two years for the price of one.

Council has been meeting virtually via ZOOM so that management of the Trust (including commenting on planning matters) has continued almost as usual behind the scenes. We have been circulating information

electronically about on-line lectures and teaching material increasingly being arranged by The Gardens Trust and other County Gardens Trusts so that members have had the opportunity to enjoy some garden activity from the safety and comfort of their own homes. Warwickshire Gardens Trust kindly invited us to share in two on-line lectures they were organising. These were very well received. At the time of writing we are beginning to explore with colleagues in Warwickshire and other adjoining counties the possibility of a series of on-line events for the next year both as a fallback in case face-to-face events are still not feasible or as a supplement to our regular programme. We will update members as planning progresses.

There has been much speculation in the press and mainstream media about what the new normal will look like post Covid. Lockdown has offered a pertinent reminder after decades of underfunding of the value of parks and green spaces in offering recreational and health benefits to local communities. It is to be hoped that if any positives emerge from the distress of the pandemic that government will recognise these benefits and increase investment in these key public amenities. As a Trust concerned to promote understanding and conservation of these invaluable resources we will take a keen interest in any initiatives to secure a sounder future for them.

I am sorry that we have not been able to get together in 2020 and very much hope we can put that behind us in 2021. In the meantime stay safe, stay well and look out for further announcements about Trust activities in person or on-line in the coming year.

Alan Taylor

“One of the most singular anomalies to be met with among the residences of Britain”- J. C. Loudon

Now home to the country's most visited theme parks, the house and grounds of Alton Towers were once the ancestral home of the Earls of Shrewsbury, and the house was at one time the largest privately-owned house in Europe.

Although a succession of architects worked on the house in the early years of its development, including Thomas Hopper, a favourite of George IV, who designed the Gothic Conservatory, and Thomas Allason, who designed the north Entrance Hall, the Chapel, the Long Gallery and the Dining Room, it is principally associated with Augustus Pugin, who designed a new entrance hall and banqueting hall and added several rooms to the house to accommodate the 16th Earl's growing family.

Pugin, a devout Christian and practising Catholic, is principally remembered as a pioneer of the Gothic Revival style of architecture, which is associated with the revival of the Roman Catholic Church in this country; St. Giles R. C. Church in Chedale is another example of his work.

The gardens were laid out between 1814 and 1827 by Charles Talbot, the 15th Earl, on the north side of a deep-sided valley and are noted for a great variety of garden buildings, which include the three-storey cast-iron Pagoda Fountain, a truncated version of the Ho-To Pagoda in Canton whose jet nonetheless reached a height of seventy feet; a reproduction of the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates, in Athens, which houses a bust of the 15th Earl; the Corkscrew Fountain; a Stonehenge (a reproduction of one of the trilithons at the prehistoric monument in

Wiltshire (“two vertical stones capped by a horizontal lintel” – EH definition); and a Swiss Cottage, the only building on the south side of the valley, built in 1835 by the 16th Earl as the home of a blind Welsh harpist, just some of the many listed buildings to be found in the gardens.

These buildings were a defining feature of the gardens until the 16th Earl introduced a programme of tree-planting which included oak, silver birch, ash and beech, which mitigated their impact.

On a dry but overcast afternoon in mid-March, shortly before the coronavirus lockdown prevented any further visits in 2020, a large party of Trust members and their friends enjoyed a guided tour of the gardens jointly led by David Rhodes, Head of Buildings and Estate at the Towers, and Alan Taylor, Chairman of the Trust.

Interior view of Conservatory



The focus of the visit was the Conservatory, recently restored at a cost of £850,000.

Designed by Robert Abraham for the 15th Earl in about 1820 (he also designed the Pagoda Fountain), it is divided into two elongated glasshouses separated by an octagonal entrance hall, or atrium, capped by a large glazed dome, which had been a prominent feature of the restoration work.

All 11,500 pieces of glass had been removed and cleaned and the cast-iron frame of the dome which held the glass in place rubbed down and re-painted.

Immediately below the dome was a large circular basin, now drained, which is believed to have been intended to reflect the intricate interior of the dome.

Winding mechanism on a pillar close to the basin seemed to suggest that a lantern or shade once hung above the basin.

However, it was not intended, as part of the restoration, to re-fill the basin, though a planting scheme was being considered for the currently empty flower beds.

Other restoration work included restoring stonework and replacing all the lead, and some sub-standard repair work carried out in the 1980s had been corrected. Doors and windows had been re-painted, and the finials along the roof had been regilded with gold leaf.

Once heated, in it was grown the first banana to be cultivated in this country in a successful competition with the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth. Pineapples were also grown, as featured in the series of finials.

At the time of their development, the gardens attracted a mixed response: according to William Adam, mid-Victorian

author of “The Gem of the Peaks”, the follies were “works of art of the noblest character”, while J. C. Loudon commented that they were “the work of a morbid imagination joined to the command of unlimited resources” – but Loudon’s own plans had been rejected by the Earl, so his judgement may not have been entirely impartial!

The work of restoring the gardens had taken eighteen months (hampered by rain!), and the labour of up to fifteen craftsmen working daily. The total cost of the restoration work, which had included work on other garden buildings, including the Pagoda Fountain and the Prospect Tower; was £1.3m., none of which had come from outside funding, the parkland being classified as a corporate business, though a grant had been received from The Woodland Trust to assist in fighting phytophthora and controlling rhododendron encroachment.

While half the party remained in the Conservatory, the other half were taken round the gardens by Alan. After a period of only basic maintenance, the gardens were also undergoing restoration. Over the seven years that David had been in post the number of gardeners had fallen from fifteen to seven, but recently a further two had been added to the workforce.

The aim now was to bring people into the gardens by laying out a series of garden walks.

(The Trust last visited Alton Towers in November 2011. Members can read about this earlier visit by visiting the Trust’s website and calling up Issue No. 45 (Winter 2011) in the Newsletter Archive)



Dome and Pond

“Memorable Gardens”

In July members were invited to write a short appreciation of a garden which had given them particular enjoyment when they visited it, either with the Trust, or as an individual.

We hope that these essays will encourage other members to share their recollection of memorable garden visits with other members.

*Our President, Charles Bagot-Jewitt, was one of the first to respond. He has vivid memories of a garden in Cornwall, **Caerhays Castle Gardens.***

“For me this is the ultimate Cornish spring garden, although there are so many others which run a close second.

“Set on a sheltered hillside leading down to the stream and the ‘Castle’, the garden has an extraordinary variety and profusion of Camellias,

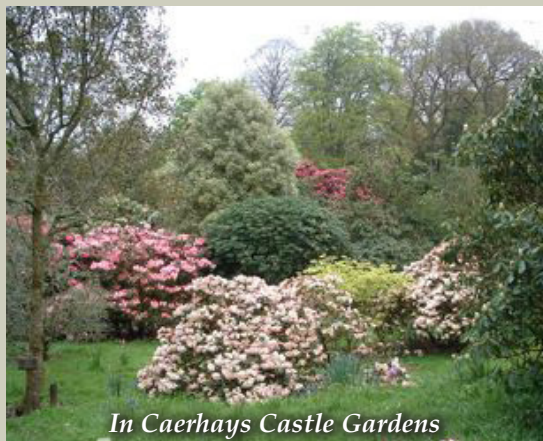
Rhododendrons and Magnolias. There are many ‘champion’ trees, and the view out to sea makes for a perfect vista. The garden never disappoints from late March to June and there is always something new to see each time you visit. Caerhays is the home of the national collection of Magnolias, and part of the enterprise is Burncoose nursery operation with its amazing catalogue.

“I first visited with Cosy shortly after we were married, and we were delighted to be told “you shouldn’t have much disturbance, you are the twenty second person in this morning”. It is a bit busier these days, but there still seems to be plenty of room for everyone. That first afternoon we went to the, then, newly founded Eden Project. What



a disappointment by comparison. Massive car parks, loads of people, some scantily dressed, many of whom didn't really seem to know why they were there apart to view the 'biomes' in an old Clay Pit. Lots of new planting but nothing really established either. Oh and lots of 'right on' notices with an environmental twist which were really seeking to extract your money.

"What these people had missed at Caerhays! Though I am very glad that they did."



In Caerhays Castle Gardens

Our Chairman, Alan Taylor, found his experience, first, as Conservation Officer for Staffordshire County Council, and then as English Heritage Inspector for Historic Buildings and Gardens, a source of perplexity when it came to making his choice!

"What a question! How to select the most outstanding from a lifetime of visiting parks and gardens, all of which have left some kind of defining memory? Is it to be Baffins Pond, the farm pond absorbed into a suburban Portsmouth park, where I first recall feeding the ducks, aged two? Could it be the concrete dinosaurs lurking in the undergrowth of the former Crystal Palace in South London? Or is it Cliveden, with that hazy, breath-taking view through the beech woods down to the Thames below? Or should it be the serene beauty of Stourhead, with the temple and grotto nestled against the lake? All of these have left their mark on me, but the garden that truly wins is here in Staffordshire – Biddulph Grange.



"I first encountered Biddulph Grange at an exhibition on the Future of the English Country House at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1974. There were only three or four black and white photos of the garden, taken from a Country Life article in 1910 when it was in its heyday, and a brief caption to say it was now somewhat run-down and at risk of being sold by its health authority owners. I had never seen such an extraordinary garden before with its mix of buildings – Cheshire Cottages cheek by jowl with Egyptian Sphinxes and Chinese temples. The potential risk to the site gave the monochrome pictures a sense of

foreboding which stuck in my mind, even though I had no connection to Staffordshire at that time and no idea of where Biddulph was.

"Quite by chance, within six months, I moved from Buckinghamshire to take up a job with Staffordshire County Council and resolved to find out more about this evocative site, so, one sweltering afternoon in May 1975, I turned up unannounced at the hospital administrator's office and asked if I could have a look round. By good fortune, Andrew was an enthusiast for the site (who wouldn't be, working in such a stunning setting?) and



needed no excuse to drop everything and lead me on a two-hour ramble through temples, pyramids, pinetums, pagodas, tunnels, over stepping stones and up the “obelisk” long walk, all enhanced by bright sunshine and the brilliant display of rhododendrons in flower. I was smitten.

“There is no space to tell fully where that initial museum visit and drop-in call to the Grange led. Suffice to say that it propelled me into the world of garden conservation, working with the late Peter Hayden and Keith Goodway, initially campaigning for seven years to raise the profile of Biddulph nationally and locally before the District Council and National Trust stepped in to acquire the site,

to getting the park designated a conservation area, a controversial extension of local authority planning powers, to Biddulph’s inclusion on the first national register of historic parks and gardens, and, in due course, drawing on the lessons of these experiences to setting up the Staffordshire Gardens and Parks Trust.

“I have visited many other gardens and parks, big and small, around the country since that time but none have gripped my imagination, absorbed so much of my time and emotional energy or influenced my thinking and professional outlook as Biddulph Grange. Truly, it is a memorable garden.”



Powis Castle

Michael Walker's choice of a memorable garden had personal associations:

"I have been lucky enough to visit a couple of gardens in recent months – one a very private garden designed by Tom Stuart Smith, and the other much more accessible, which is Powis Castle, in mid Wales.

"My father-in-law, Jimmy Hancock, had been the Head Gardener at Powis for twenty-five years, and it was a place where Diane grew up as a child, and was where we met when I was a young trainee on secondment from Mount Stewart, in Northern Ireland. Her family still live close by, but it had been some years since I last visited.

"It was one of those wonderful sunny days just before the weather changed. The social distancing arrangements were commendable, but it seemed very odd to follow a one-way system through the garden with its diversions.

"If you haven't had the pleasure of visiting, then I would say you have one of the UK's best garden treasures to add to your bucket list. The red sandstone castle stands high on a hill above Welshpool. The views across Long Mountain and the Breidden Hills are so very beautiful and create an immediate sense of place. Below the castle and its once formal terraces there is little sense of a long-lost formal water garden, where today there are simple grass paddocks and wildflower meadows – my wife's family once grazed a few goats there and had a very friendly donkey called Henry, who literally had free roam

of the garden and terraces – can you imagine that today?

"Ancient trees in the beautiful but private park lie outside The National Trust boundary and still belong to the Earl of Powis. The Castle sits aloft a series of steep terraces which are adorned with lead statues, beautifully planted vases and the famous Yew 'Tumps', which are informally cloud-trimmed topiary which had long ago been manicured with precision.

"The terraces are planted with beautiful perennial planting which Christopher Lloyd felt compelled to write about and no doubt took some inspiration from. One of the borders has a range of delicate and unusual tropical-effect plants, but on this point only I was disappointed that the display appeared to be a little 'dumbed down', and a recent addition of Chusan Palms probably didn't help. But the perennial and tender plantings are absolutely superb and define one of the very best examples of horticulture anywhere.

"Despite Covid and the horrible cuts that The National Trust is now having to make, the garden looked immaculate and is a very great credit to the extremely talented team that maintain and cherish it. Our visit was genuinely soul-lifting and gave us all a sense of normality that we have recently not been accustomed to.

"My expectations for Powis Castle will always be extremely high, and it is incredible that these were delivered during such incredibly difficult time."



Mary Brass' choice is Wollerton Old Hall, in Shropshire. She writes: "My favourite garden is Wollerton Old Hall, near Market Drayton. This is a beautifully kept and extremely pretty garden in Wollerton. It was started by John and Leslie Jenkins in 1984, who live in the beautiful 16th century house around which the garden is designed. It is an Arts and Crafts garden, and is a series of 'rooms', each with its own planting and colour.

"It covers four acres and includes 125 varieties of clematis, 85 varieties of salvia and many varieties of roses. The 'rooms' are linked by perennials, oak, beech and yew topiary. There are arches, water features, a summer house and a logia. Pretty gates help to divide one section from another.

"They also have a tea room which serves homemade cakes and where, for a time, I had Art lessons with John and Leslie's son, Edward.

"It is a magical place on a warm, summer's evening, a very special place, and, for those who haven't been, worth a visit."

Mithra Tonking drew on her long experience as an archivist to share with other members her research into vanished Staffordshire garden:

"There are plenty of extant wonderful Staffordshire gardens. But there are also gardens that no longer exist, which the imagination (and recorded evidence) might recreate. And, yes, West Bromwich was once in Staffordshire!

"An odd document held by the Sandwell Community History & Archives Service is intriguing. It consists of correspondence accompanying lists of trees and fruit brushes supplied to Sir Samuel Clarke, a London merchant, who purchased West Bromwich Manor in 1720. Not the famous West Bromwich Hall, where the garden was lovingly restored and is available to visit, but that of the smaller manor house now known as Bromwich Hall. This medieval timber-framed building has seen a chequered past, including life as accommodation for the local curate and later a pub.

"Whilst the building is now a museum, the gardens have long gone, and there are only the vestiges of the moat that once surrounded them. Written on the reverse of a document in Portuguese about shipping goods to the Port of London for a Samuel Clarke Junior, the lists paint a detailed picture of the garden's layout and the ambitious planting by Sir Samuel senior. There is mention of the parlour garden being the Best or Great Garden, of the "south-west Aspect of the left hand side coming from the house, being that side of the Wall unto which the end of the Barn leaneth", the kitchen garden, and of "the north East Aspect, or the Wall on the Left hand from the house, being that wall over against which ye Slaughterhouse" and other sites, each with a designated set of plants. The gardener, John Thomas is named, and given detailed instructions as to the planting.

“Sent from Adam Holt of Leytonstone, the trees are bundled and carefully marked with numbered lead labels. There are grapes – White muscadine, Royall, and Red July – and pears – Old Newington, Scarlet Newington, Girls bury, Diana, Early Amber, Gros Blanquet, There are Newington nectarines, Turkey Apricot, standard Roman Apricots and Vanguard peaches. And plums – early apples of every kind – early Amber, Drab d’or, Pomegrande, white and black Damozeen, Blue Violet. And apples of every kind – French pippin, English Golden pippins, Kentish pippins,

Summer Gillyflowers, Summer and Winter Pearmain, Golden Rennetts, Non par Elles and Bernards Apples “for baking”. And, of course, mulberries, cherries, gooseberries, white raspberries, red and white Dutch currants, not forgetting philberds and figs. And a host of other varieties. Not all the trees survived – some “miscarried and died in place” and had to be replaced.

“The detailed instructions for planting and locations tempt me to plot out the garden with its planting, but I haven’t yet found a contemporary map or plan....”



The Katyn Memorial Stone on Cannock Chase



Observant travellers crossing Cannock Chase by car, on cycle or on foot will not fail to notice the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery (visited by the Trust in May 2018) and may, as a consequence, discover the German Military Cemetery which lies behind it (also visited by the Trust in September 2017). Some may know that the Chase was once the site of military training camps during both World War 1 and World War 2. Probably less well known is a third memorial to the two great conflicts which dominated the twentieth century.

Less than a mile away, set well back from the road and approached along a track, is a large boulder standing on a stone plinth and set in a secluded glade surrounded on three sides by pine trees and birches – the Katyn Memorial.

What does it commemorate?
What follows is its story.

The Background

On 1st September 1939 German forces crossed Poland's western border, thus precipitating World War Two, which broke out two days later. On September 17th, Soviet forces invaded the country from the east in accordance with a non-aggression pact drawn up in August 1939 by Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop, respectively Russia's and Germany's Foreign Ministers, thus dividing the stricken country into two halves, the western half occupied by the Germans, the eastern by the Russians.

The following year, an order drawn up by Lavrentiy Beria, head of the NKVD, Russia's secret police tasked with imposing political conformity and repressing dissent, and signed by, amongst others, the Russian dictator himself, Josef Stalin, was given for the wholesale execution of all Polish Officers and members of the

Polish intelligentsia held in captivity by the Russians since the invasion – “intelligence agents, gendarmes, landowners, factory owners, lawyers and judges, government officials and priests” – in fact, anyone judged likely to be “a hardened and uncompromising enemy of Soviet authority”, that is, anyone likely to oppose the imposition of a puppet government on the country by Communist Russia (which was to remain in power for the next four decades).

Executions were carried out between April and May 1940, and it is estimated that 14,500 were massacred, 4253 alone at a site in the Katyn Forest+ known as ‘Goat Hill’, while thousands of others from prisoner-of-war camps in Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostaszkw (in former monasteries closed by an atheist government), where they had been confined, were shot, all despatched in cold blood by a single shot to the back of the head. The complete number of those shot is estimated at 22,000.

The outside world, large parts of which were engaged in a struggle for survival with a brutal dictatorship with world-conquering ambitions, remained ignorant of this atrocity until, in June 1941, reneging on its treaty, Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Soviet Russia.

“Murder will out”*

In 1942 the territory around Smolensk, the region in western Russia where the sites of the massacres were located, was under German occupation and, responding to reports brought to them by local peasants, they quickly uncovered the mass graves, seven in number, left by the Russians, in Katyn Forest. Seizing the opportunity this gruesome discovery offered them to sow discord amongst the

Allies, the Germans invited representatives of the International Red Cross to join them in excavating the site.

When this was blocked by the Russians, the Germans set up their own commission composed of forensic experts from all over Europe, and although all but one, a Swiss, came from a country occupied or sympathetic to Germany, it may be concluded that they had no need to exert pressure on the Commission if the facts already pointed to a favourable conclusion.

A significant discovery which seemed to confirm Russian responsibility was the fact that none of the documents found on any of the corpses was dated later than 1940, nor had any of the families of the prisoners held at these three camps received any correspondence since the Spring of 1940, their own correspondence thereafter being returned marked simply “Return to Sender”. Moreover, the site had already been used to carry out executions by the Russian authorities as early as 1918.

Not unexpectedly, the Soviet authorities immediately denied responsibility and, having recaptured the area in late 1943, they set about persuading the Allies that the massacre had been carried out by the Germans, setting up their own commission to examine the site, planting forged documents and producing intimidated locals coerced into giving ‘eye-witness accounts’. The Commission concluded that the massacre had been carried out by the Germans, a not entirely unexpected conclusion since the personnel comprising the commission was exclusively Russian!

In private, both British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt conceded that the Russians had been responsible - Churchill,



Gunnersby

certainly, had no doubt, but forbade any public acknowledgement, while Roosevelt suppressed a report confirming Russian involvement, observing “The winning of the war is the paramount objective for all of us. For this unity is necessary”.

It was not until 1990, one year before the final dissolution of the already crumbling Soviet Republic, that the Russian Parliament formally acknowledged that its own secret police had carried out the massacre on the orders of Stalin and other senior political figures, though even then it declined to set up an enquiry to ascertain the facts, arguing that, by now, the perpetrators were almost certainly all dead (As late as 2008 sections of the Russian press were continuing to deny Russian responsibility, blaming the atrocity on the “fascist invaders”).

However, in June 1998, memorials were erected at Katyn and Mednoye, two of the sites where executions had taken place, and in February 2010 Vladimir Putin, then Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, invited Donald Tusk, then Prime Minister of Poland, to join him at a Katyn memorial service.

Remembering Katyn

Apart from the many memorials erected in Poland, there are memorials worldwide, including the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa. The earliest to be erected in the UK is to be found at Gunnersbury Cemetery#, in Chiswick, dedicated on 18th September 1976 in the face of opposition from the Government, who refused to contribute to its cost and declined to be officially represented at its



Manchester

unveiling and even put pressure on the British Legion not to attend†, no doubt fearing a hostile reaction from the Russian Government if it played any part in the erection of the monument (The Russians had installed a puppet Communist Government in Poland by the end of the war, Stalin having refused to recognise or negotiate with the Polish government-in-exile based in London during the war and subsequently renegeing on his promise to allow the country free elections).

For the same reason, the Poles were not invited to take part in the Victory Parade held in London in 1946, even though 228,000 Polish Servicemen had served under British Command on land, at sea and in the air during the war, making them the fourth largest Allied armed force after the Russian, the American and the British & Commonwealth forces.

Another monument erected in the face of official discouragement was the memorial to be found in the South Manchester

Cemetery, where organisers struggled for years to obtain the necessary planning permission before it was eventually unveiled in 1990.

Other memorials took the form of a plaque fixed to the outside wall of a Polish club and centre, as at Birmingham (unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham on 21st September 1980) and Glasgow (unveiled on 17th September 1995, the 56th anniversary of the German invasion of Poland), while at Southwell Minster an inscribed tablet is to be found located on a wall within the Airmen's Chapel and dedicated in May 1987 in the presence of the Duke of Rutland and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Nottingham. There is an urn containing soil from the Katyn Forest in the pillar immediately behind the tablet.



Southwell Minster



Staffordshire's memorial

At a meeting of Staffordshire County Council's Countryside Sub-Committee held on 17th April 1978, it was reported that a letter had been received from the Wolverhampton branch of the Anglo-Polish Society proposing the erection of a small memorial in the form of an obelisk inscribed with the words: "In memorial to the 14, 000 members of the Polish Armed Forces and professional classes who were executed in Katyn Forest, Nineteen Hundred and Forty (1940)" and asking for permission for it to be erected near the British War Cemetery and the German War Cemetery on Cannock Chase.



The letter had suggested that the memorial might be erected near to the British War Cemetery and the German War Cemetery on Cannock Chase. The letter had gone on to state that, to all Polish people in this country, the question of Katyn was still probably the most emotive subject. They had all been bitterly hurt when the British Government in 1976 had refused to officially recognise the unveiling of the memorial in Gunnersby Cemetery in London and in fact had pressurized The Royal British Legion into not attending.

It added that the Polish Committee had fought for nearly ten years to raise the money only to receive the utmost obstruction from the current Government.

The Committee decided that further details should be sought before it could consider the proposal.

In the meantime, the Sub-Committee consulted the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, who suggested that there might be some difficulty over the location if it were near the German Cemetery; while the Department of the Environment, to whom the Home Office had referred the matter, stated that it was a matter for the County Council as the Local Planning Authority to determine.

The Chairman of the Countryside Sub-Committee then met representatives of the Anglo-Polish Society on the Chase to discuss the proposal. It was suggested to the Chairman that, although there were already a number of other Katyn memorials elsewhere in the country, this might (presumably because of its central location) attract Poles from all parts of the country, as well as from abroad, and in future become "a place of natural pilgrimage for all Polish ex-patriates and for all reasonable people who considered that the Crime of Katyn should never be forgotten".

There were as yet no fixed ideas as to the location of the memorial or the form it should take, and the Society was prepared to accept whatever form the County Council considered appropriate.

Several locations were considered, and eventually the present site was chosen, where it would be set in a natural enclosure surrounded on three sides by pines and birches. Expressing their satisfaction at the suggested site, the Polish representatives commented that it was very reminiscent of the Katyn area.

Finally, it was agreed that the memorial should take the form of a rough, natural boulder surrounded by an area five yards square surfaced with either Cannock Chase gravel or random stone paving, while a path would lead from a newly-laid car park to the memorial. All work should be carried out and all expense met by the Anglo-Polish Society, including future maintenance, though the County Council made a donation towards the cost.

The unveiling and dedication of the memorial took place on Sunday, 16th September 1979, when earth from the Katyn Forest was buried in the memorial. Several hundred Poles were present at the ceremony, which was attended by a number of dignitaries, including Kazimiecz Sabat, Prime Minister of the Polish Government-in-Exile, to whom the memorial was formally handed over and who, in addressing the crowd, said that it was time to forgive and forget, but only if those responsible admitted their guilt. Lord St. Oswald, who, as chairman of the Anglo-Polish Society of Great Britain, had also attended the dedication of the memorial at Gunnersby; the Right Reverend Joseph Clearly, Auxiliary Bishop of Birmingham; Nicholas Budgen, MP for Wolverhampton South-West; and Patrick Cormack, MP for Staffordshire South-West, were also present.

The memorial was unveiled by Zygmunt Stamszewski, whose father, a military judge, was amongst those murdered.

In 2010 this memorial was replaced by the present larger memorial mounted on a new plinth, below which a jar containing soil from Katyn was buried.

A service of remembrance is held at the memorial each year, though it may be visited throughout the year.

The Katyn Memorial Stone is the third and arguably most poignant of these man-made features imposed on a landscape already significantly altered by human intervention.

+ The massacre is known as “The Katyn Massacre”, because the first bodies were found in the Katyn Forest, but other bodies were found at Kharkov, in the Ukraine, then part of the USSR, and Mednoe, near Kalinin, a city north-west of Moscow.

* Shakespeare, “The Merchant of Venice”

The Katyn Memorial Trust was set up in November 1971 with the purpose of designing a memorial, finding a site in London for its erection and raising sufficient funding to cover the cost of the project. The original site chosen was St. Luke’s Garden, in Chelsea, an open space offered by the Kensington and Chelsea Council, but, because it had once been a graveyard, the permission of the London Diocese was also required. However, strong objection had been made by both the Russian and Polish Embassies to the inscribing of the date ‘1940’ on the monument which would have unequivocally attributed the crime to the Russians, who described the project as “provocative and slanderous” and called on the Council to prevent the project

from proceeding. Instead, the wording “in the early years of the war” was suggested.

The Church authorities decided that the project was intended to be politically provocative and for that reason could not be supported and withheld permission.

The memorial, a twenty-foot obelisk of black granite on a stepped base, was finally erected in September 1976 in Gunnersbury Cemetery (also owned by the Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, who were less submissive to Government - or Russian - pressure), at a cost of nearly £28,000. Its inscription is unequivocal; those whom the monument commemorates were murdered by the Soviet Secret Police on Stalin’s orders “As finally admitted in April 1990 by the U. S. S. R after 50 years shameful denial of the truth”.

† However, some MPs attended the ceremony in an unofficial capacity.

(Sources consulted in the preparation of this article included the minutes of the Countryside Sub-Committee of Staffordshire County Council; “Katyn Massacre”, by Louis Fitzgibbon, Corgi Books, 1977; “The Express & Star”; “The Sunday Mercury”; and various websites)

Photo of Gunnersbury Cemetery Memorial by Kerim44, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

Photo of Katyn Massacre plaque, Southwell Minster - Taken by Leslie Scarborough

Photo of Manchester South Cemetery Katyn Memorial by HM Sullivan

The Editor would be pleased to hear from any member of the Anglo-Polish community who has personal recollections or photographs of the Cannock Chase Memorial which he or she would like to share and which could be used in a later article.

PROGRAMME 2021

Saturday, 17 April

***Hartlebury Castle, near
Stourport-on-Severn, Worcs.***

Dating from the 13th century, this still-part-moated Grade I Listed building was, until 2007, the residence of the Bishops of Worcester. Put up for sale by the Church of England, it was bought by the Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust, with the aid of public funds.

It houses the Hurd Library, an extensive collection of historic books and documents, as well as the Worcestershire County Museum. Its extensive grounds, restored in 2017, include the Sunken Garden, The Queen Elizabeth Walk, created in 1575 for the first Elizabeth, and The Orchard Terrace, known to George III

The gardens also include a cider mill and Transport Gallery, which houses a collection of historic vehicles

Saturday, 15 May

***Annual General Meeting at
Blithfield Hall, the home of the
SGPT President,
Charles Bagot-Jewitt.***

Already well-known to many of our members, the Hall has been the home of the Bagot family since the late 14th century.

Mainly Elizabethan in style, its Gothic façade was added in the 1820s.

It is noted for its 18th century Orangery, designed by James Stuart.

It is also noted as the home of the Bagot goat, an historic breed of goats which have lived on the estate for hundreds of years.

Saturday, 19 June

Ilam Park, near Ashbourne.

Our Chairman, Alan Taylor, will lead members (and their friends) round (part of) this 150-acre National Park, situated on either side of the River Manifold, in picturesque Dovedale.

The Hall, which was built in the Neo-Gothic style in the 1820s, was part-demolished in the 1930s before the surviving remains, including the entrance porch and hall and the Great Hall, were saved and donated to The National Trust, and it is now run as an International Youth Hostel. There is an Italianate Garden in the grounds – and a tearoom highly rated by visitors!

Tuesday, 6 July

***Wollerton Old Hall Gardens,
near Market Drayton***

Situated in the neighbouring county of Shropshire, the gardens are set round a 16th century Grade II Listed Hall and are, in fact, a series of garden ‘rooms’ enclosed within hedges, each planted with a variety of perennials, including clematis, salvias and dahlias.

Readers will have read SGPT member Mary Brass’s appreciation of these gardens and will need little more encouragement to join in this visit.

PROGRAMME 2021

Thursday, 23 September

A day visit to two Cotswold Gardens

This visit to two gardens noted for their autumn colours is being arranged by SGPT member Michael Faarup, who organised the very successful visit to Spetchley Park, in Worcestershire, last May.

The gardens the Trust will be visiting are at Kiftsgate Court, near Chipping Norton, and Broughton House, Moreton-in-Marsh. The former started in the 1920s, are the work of three women gardeners, and are noted for their roses, especially the Kiftgate Rose a scented climbing rose, while the latter are noted for their “luxuriant terraces and wide herbaceous borders”, their topiary and their parterre. Both are memorable for their display of colour in later September and early October.

Wednesday, 6 October *Hanley Park, Stoke-on-Trent.*

This visit is a follow-up on the talk given to Trust members last November by Claire Studman, one of the Park’s liaison officers, who will take us on a guided tour of the Park.

(See leading article in Newsletter No. 61, Winter 2019/20, now to be found on the SGPT website)

*The Hammersley Fountain
Hanley Park*

Wednesday, 24 November

Talk on restoration of Victoria Park, Stafford

Situated on the banks of the River Sow and opened in 1908, the Park has since been extended twice, in 1911 and 1930, but retains its historic core. Under restoration since 2009, which should be completed by the end of this year, it should be in first-class condition when the Trust visits it.

Its attractions include an aviary, a sensory garden, riverside walk and a play area. The County War Memorial, unveiled in 1923, stands within its grounds.

The talk, which will be given by a member of the Park’s support team, is expected to take place at The Haling Dene Centre, Penkridge.



Season's Greetings

OFFICERS OF THE TRUST (2019/20)

President: Charles Bagot-Jewitt

Chairman: Alan Taylor

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Membership Secretary: John Hyde

Newsletter Editor: Bryan Sullivan

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Website Manager: Julie Hall

Company Secretary: Catherine Thorpe

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Julie Hall

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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.

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