

# Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

Summer 2023 - ISSUE No. 67

# News Letter



*Hatton Grange*



*The original entrance hall*



## THE YEAR SO FAR

### *Weston Park: "a veritable art gallery"*

The Trust's first visit of the year was to Weston Park on a Sunday afternoon in April. One third of Weston Park lies in the neighbouring county of Shropshire, so it was appropriate that the Trust should be joined on this visit by members of the Shropshire Parks and Gardens Trust on this visit.

The visit was hosted by Gareth Williams, Curator and Head of Learning, and author of the recently-published "Weston Park: The House, the families and the influence", who gave an introductory talk on the history of the house and family before leading the party on a tour of the house.

#### *The House*

The hall at Weston Park which hosts tens of thousands of visitors each year dates from 1671 and replaces an earlier medieval mansion. Regarded as one of the earliest in the Renaissance style, it was built to the design of Lady Wilbraham, a keen amateur architect; the library contains a volume in

translation of the works of Andreas Palladio, the influential sixteenth century architect, the margins of which contain her comments.

Subsequent generations have left their mark on the building, the most significant change being the re-location of the main entrance from the south side of the house to the east, where entrance is now through a stone portico.



The library

Once inside, the visitor is greeted by the spectacular Marble Hall, so called because of its floor of white marble and black slate. Venturing further into the house, the visitor will find him/herself in a veritable art gallery, each room resplendent with antique furniture dating from the reign of Louis XIV, wall hanging woven at the Gobelin factory in Paris and chairs covered by Aubusson tapes

Hanging on the walls are paintings by Reynolds, Gainsborough, Stubbs, Van Dyck, Lely and many other masters.



**The dining room**



**The salon, with Stubbs' paintings of horses**



## *The Grounds*

While the focus of the visit was on the house and its contents, members of the party were afterwards free to access the garden and grounds, some of whom would take the opportunity of a walk round its formal gardens and parkland; the hope was later expressed that a guided tour of the grounds might form part of a later programme.

In 1766 and again in 1768, Sir Henry Bridgeman commissioned 'Capability' Brown to landscape the park (once a medieval deer park) and James Paine to design the Temple of Diana and the Roman Bridge in 1770s. The constraints put upon the limits of the park by the A5 Watling Road, which runs along its western boundary, and the Shrewsbury Road, which runs



***The formal garden (south front)***

along its northern, meant that the development was restricted to the south.

It followed Brown's customary practice of the laying down of plantations of trees in order to screen off buildings or rural activities disturbing to the genteel mind (hence the planting of the Temple Wood, which cut off view of the busy Watling Road).



***The formal garden (west front)  
with orangery in background***



**The Roman Bridge**

Elsewhere in the park, trees were carefully planted individually or in clumps to 'improve' the landscape.

Subsequent owners added exotic trees unknown to Brown – like the sorbus huhensis , a rowan popularly known as the 'Pink Pagoda', and the Snake Bark Maple, discovered by Père David, The French missionary and zoologist of deer fame - until the wood became a veritable arboretum!

Brown was also responsible for laying down the ha-ha which encircles part of the park.

A more formal garden was laid out in Victorian times to the south and west of the house. More accurately described as a series of gardens, each distinctive in their own form and planting, they range from the terraced Long Border, the Rose

Garden below (from which the visitor can view the Plane Tree Lawn with its magnificent plane tree at its centre), and the Rose Border, while, on the west side of the house, is to be found the Broderie, or Italian Garden planted in the style of a parterre

Overlooking it is the Orangery added in 1865, in which exotic fruits were grown. The visitor may then make their way along tree-lined Shrewsbury Walk along Shrewsbury Walk to the Tear Drop Garden at its furthest distance from the house before returning along Rose Walk past Church Pool and the local church.

The Tear Drop Garden takes its name from the shape of its central bed and statue of a weeping woman, her tears variously attributed to rejection by her lover or the death of her baby.



A prominent feature in the landscape, the Temple of Diana enjoys a commanding position from which sweeping views of Brown's parkland can be enjoyed, Designed by James Paine to serve as a tearoom and dairy, its walls decorated with scenes of Diana's life, the provision of 'an exceeding good bed chamber' has given rise to speculation that it was also the location for illicit encounters between master and maid.

The responsibility of managing these gardens rests with the Head Gardener, Martin Gee. When Martin started work at Weston Park as an apprentice in 1969, he was extending an unbroken family tradition which began back in 1804, when John Gee arrived at Weston Park from the family's estate in Norfolk to start work as ploughman. Since then a member of the Gee family has been employed on the estate; Martin took over as Head Gardener in the late 1970s. Sadly, he will be the last in the family line, his daughter having other ambitions and aspirations.

## *P. G. Wodehouse and Weston Park*

A literary association with Weston Park of which this writer for one had been unaware is with the humorous writings P. G. Wodehouse, best known as the creator of Bertie Wooster and his manservant, Jeeves,

As a boy, Wodehouse lived with his family in Stableford, a village not far from Weston Park; the family then moved to Cheltenham, less than eight miles from Winchcombe, within whose environs stands Studeley Castle (in whose chapel lie the remains Catherine Parr, Henry VIII's sixth (and last) wife).

Blandings Castle, the home of (the fictitious) Lord Emsworth, is said to have been inspired by Wodehouse's familiarity with these two historic houses, Studeley Castle providing him with the model for the house, and Weston Park the various features of the grounds, including a teasing reference in one of his novels to "a little sort of imitation Greek temple"!

WBS



*The Temple of Diana  
viewed from the house*



*Temple Pool, with  
Roman bridge in  
the background*








# HATTON GRANGE;

## “a little known, but very attractive historic estate”



*In turn, members of the Staffordshire Trust were invited to join members of the Shropshire Trust on a visit to Hatton Grange near Shifnal on a day in late July.*

### *Hatton Grange party*

Before the Dissolution Hatton Grange had belonged to Buildwas Abbey, but had been purchased by Robert Slaney after the middle of the seventeenth century and has been in the hands of the same family ever since. The Slaneys were originally ironmasters from Yardley in what is now south Birmingham but had owned land in Shropshire since the sixteenth century. The move to Hatton reflected the growing prosperity of the family in conjunction with the growth of the iron industry in and around nearby Severn Gorge.

The Slaney's original dwelling was further to the west of the current park and was known until recently as Grange Farm. Plowden Slaney inherited the estate in 1757 and in 1764 commissioned the fashionable Shrewsbury architect and

builder, Thomas Farnolls Pritchard, to design the present Hatton Grange which has been described as 'one of Pritchard's most complete existing works' and 'a good example of a provincial Georgian country house'. Pritchard, architect, interior designer and designer of funerary monuments, was born in Shrewsbury, and worked mainly within his native county, but history remembers him as the designer of the first cast-iron bridge, constructed across the River Severn at Coalbrookdale in 1779, two years after his death.

Outwardly the house (remodelled and extended in the nineteenth century) resembles a comfortable three storey vernacular farmhouse of the period but internally contains some fine examples of mid eighteenth century plasterwork.



The house sits a considerable distance back from the Shifnal to Wolverhampton road at the centre of an extensive landscape park. It is not known who designed the park. The name William Emes is often canvassed as the park is broadly in his style and he was known to be working at other sites in the locality. However, there is no known documentary evidence to support this attribution and it

is just as likely that the park was laid out by the Slaney's estate manager under the direction of the family.

The present entrance drive terminates in a carriage circle in front of the west elevation to where the front door was moved by the architect John McVicar Anderson in the 1880s.

The south front, remodelled at the same time by the addition of two canted bays,



*The dovecote*



overlooks one of two parterre gardens (the other is on the east side) laid out in the mid twentieth century by the successive wives of the then owner. Beyond the haha is an extensive view across wood pasture to a small domed pavilion designed by Clough Williams Ellis (of Port Meirion fame) in the 1960s.

To the north of the house is a woodland garden, at the centre of which is the delightful sunken blue garden laid out in the 1930s around a central pool (the name is derived from the predominance of blue flora in the selection of plants). Further to

the north east is the former walled kitchen garden (with that intriguing rarity of one curved corner).

The garden is no longer used for vegetable growing (nor on the evidence of an abandoned tennis court for an intermediate use) but the family are gradually planting an orchard of fruit trees historically found in Shropshire. The David Austin rose nursery is not far away from Hatton: the family has worked with Austins to create a vibrant rose display along the east and south facing walls of the one time vegetable garden.



*The small orchard garden*



*The spectacular Rose Walk*





*The Rose Walk -  
a closer view*





*Distant view of William Ellis pavilion*



The visitors took tea in the former cricket pavilion, a purpose built wooden structure erected in the 1920s overlooking the cricket pitch. The latter, now in a very overgrown state, is another memory of a bygone age, no games having been played there since 1943.

While some members had to leave at this point a more intrepid group stayed on for an energetic walk around the Dingle, a natural tree shaded ravine following the course of a stream which seems to have been dammed, possibly as monastic fishponds originally, to create four large pools. The Dingle has signs of being revitalised in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when a frieze of yew trees was planted along the eastern boundary and extensive civil engineering works undertaken through the natural rock to manage the water flows.

The main drive from Shifnal and the west ran along a ledge above the stream until recent times forming a very dramatic approach to the house. Hatton is very close to Badger Dingle and not that many miles from the better known Downton Gorge, so it is not improbable that the Slaneys took their inspiration from one or other of these two sites in developing their own landscape. Once again it is unknown if a professional designer such as Emes (who had worked at Badger) was involved.

The tour of the Dingle was a highpoint of the afternoon which, overall, had provided an opportunity to see a little-known but very attractive historic estate but one which, once again, left the tantalising mystery of “who was the designer?” unresolved.



***“a more intrepid group  
stayed on for an energetic  
walk around the Dingle”***





# **DR DAVID CHATFORD-CLARK AND KEITH GOODWAY'S ACADEMIC ARCHIVE**

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*The Trust is saddened to report the death in Palm Springs, California, of the Rev. Dr. David Chatford-Clark, the academic executor of Dr Keith Goodway, the Trust's first chairman. Members will recall that, after David spoke about Keith and his special subject of William Emes at the Trust's conference on Emes in 2017, it was agreed that he would collaborate with SGPT to produce a catalogue raisonne of Keith's work on the subject. Before any progress could be made David was recalled to the USA by his diocesan bishop, leaving the Goodway archive in store at an unknown location somewhere in the UK. The last contact with David was in June 2019, when he was recovering from a major heart attack and awaiting medical clearance to return to the UK.*

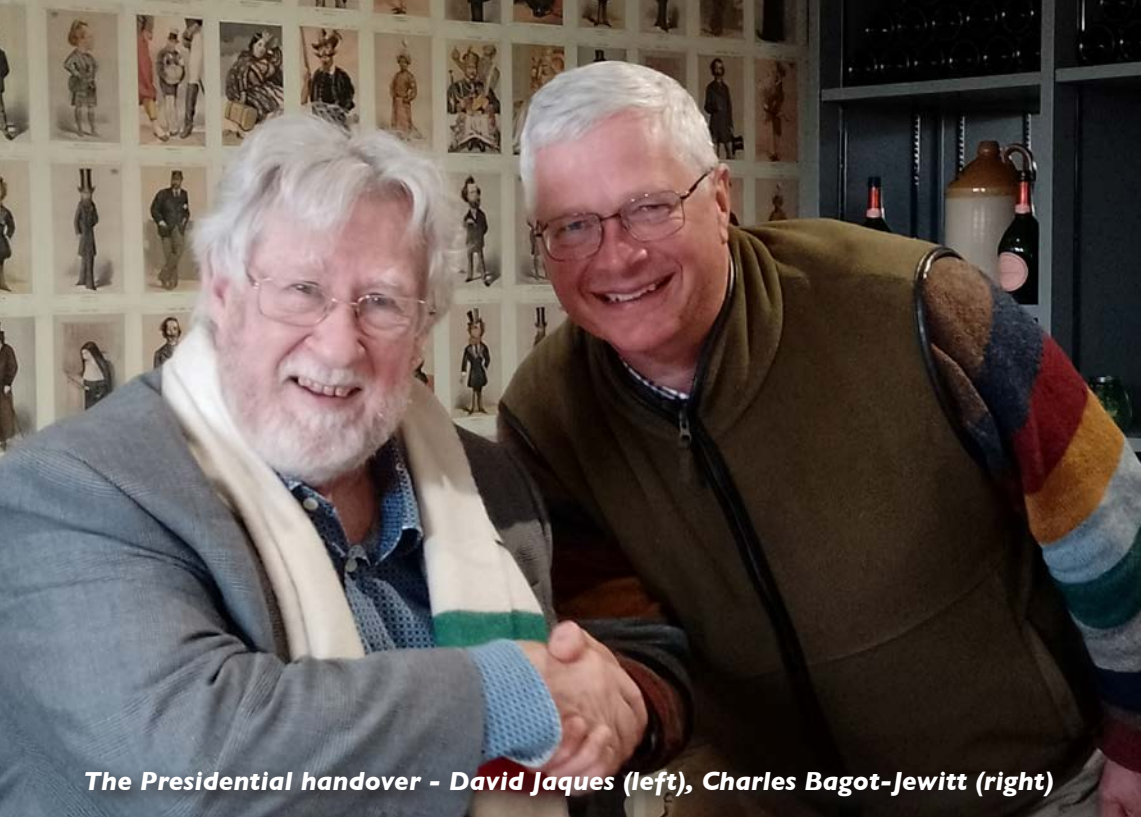
*Attendees of the Trust's most recent AGMs will know that, as time passed, fears had been growing both for David's welfare, the whereabouts of the Goodway archive, and the receding possibility of any publication. In June, quite out of the blue, the Chairman received an e-mail from a former parishioner of David's with the news both of his death in April this year and that she had a few boxes of his papers stored in her loft. This was quickly followed by another communication to say that David's family had come across from the USA to wind up his affairs and, having located the archive in two storage units, were offering them to SGPT.*

*The 23 boxes of papers were swiftly collected from Northampton and placed in temporary storage at our President's house. It had been hoped that the archive could eventually be deposited as a single collection with a university or other institution, but none could be found with an interest in rehoming it en masse. After the Trust's President and Chairman spent several afternoons sorting through the material, various sub-collections were identified reflecting various strands of Keith's work and researches. The archive was then broken down into smaller units, which we are pleased to say have now been distributed to Keele University Estates Department, Kelmarsh Hall, The Gardens Trust, Cheshire and Warwickshire Gardens Trusts respectively.*

*The largest single collection, seven boxes of Keith's papers on Emes, have been taken by Prue Keeley-Davies, who also spoke at the 2017 conference and is completing a doctoral thesis on Emes. It is very pleasing that Prue has agreed to review and catalogue the papers and to work with SGPT in producing a suitable publication, thereby resuming the original project set up with the late Dr Clark. Members will be kept informed of progress as the project develops.*

**A.G.T.**





*The Presidential handover - David Jaques (left), Charles Bagot-Jewitt (right)*

## **REPORT OF COUNCIL OF MANAGEMENT 2023**

After the restrictions and restraints around the COVID pandemic progressively eased the Trust continued its resumption of a more “normal” looking programme of events in 2022. Charlie Bagot-Jewitt, our president for the last 10 years, stepped down from the role to be succeeded by Dr David Jacques. The Trust celebrated its thirtieth anniversary in midsummer with an event at Blithfield. The current chairman gave an overview of the history and development of the Trust and reminiscences of the last three decades were presented by two past chairmen. The afternoon was rounded off with tea and a light-hearted quiz on Staffordshire garden history. The AGM in May was held at Bishton Hall and was combined with an opportunity to view the landscaped gardens

overlooked by an impressive Doric Temple of enigmatic date. Further visits were undertaken to Ilam Hall and the Upper Park at Sandon Hall, with the year rounded off by a talk from our new president on Chiswick House. Unfortunately, attendance at the latter events was lower than anticipated: it is unclear if this was due to the challenging topography at two of the sites or a reluctance, noted in other organisations, to engage with public activities post pandemic. We will be monitoring how matters evolve in 2023. As mentioned in Council’s report to the 2022 AGM, the Trust has continued to share opportunities first developed during the pandemic to join on-line lectures being promoted elsewhere in the garden history movement.



Council of SGPT met on-line regularly throughout the year. This has been found to be an effective and time saving method of communication which has shown no adverse impact on the running of the Trust. The new A5 format of the Newsletter has received a very favourable reception; one issue has been published during the year.

The Trust works with The Gardens Trust, the national overarching gardens conservation body for England and Wales, in commenting on planning applications. 2022 was a busy year in this respect with nine applications being received in relation to the grade II\* Trentham Gardens alone. These ranged from improvements to car park signage, through to extensive remodelling of an estate cottage and adaptation of another to a food kiosk, retention of EV charging points and dining pods installed without permission, and erection of a beaver-proof fence around the lake. The Trusts objected outright to two proposals, accepted one as submitted and put forward constructive suggestions for amending the other six schemes. The Trust was pleased to work with the National Trust to arrive at an acceptable scheme for a safety handrail around the Bandstand at Biddulph Grange. We objected vigorously to an application for a mobile phone mast within the grade I historic park at Shugborough and were very pleased when it was refused permission by Stafford Borough Council. The Trusts objected to a proposal to site an electric battery storage facility connected to the national grid immediately adjoining the grade II registered park at Great Barr Hall, Walsall. This was refused permission by the local planning authority but is currently the subject of a planning


appeal. Finally and most concerning is a proposal to replace the redundant golf course within Capability Brown landscape in the grade II registered park at Patshull with a development of 100 mobile homes. The Trust has written several letters of objection over the last year: a decision is awaited.

Although the Trust made a small operational loss in 2022 its financial position remained stable in the year due to healthy reserves in the bank. The main items of expenditure, namely publication of the newsletter, insurances and affiliation to The Gardens Trust, outstrip subscription income. The shortfall can be made up by any surplus income received from events or donations, but it is not prudent to rely on "windfalls" to fund regular outgoings. Council is constantly looking for opportunities to control expenditure and increase income. A growth in membership would be helpful in this respect – all members are encouraged to assist in recruitment. 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 our outgoing president for his contribution over the last decade and to fellow members of Council, who have worked tirelessly through the year. Their commitment and enthusiasm has ensured that the Trust has survived the past few challenging years and was well placed as the post COVID world opened up.

**Alan Taylor - Chairman**

*The Editor wishes to place on record his very real appreciation of the support given to him in the preparation of this Newsletter by Michael Faarup, John Hyde and Alan Taylor.*



**The rose walk  
alongside the  
walled garden**

## **OFFICERS OF THE TRUST (2023/24)**

**President:** Dr. David Jacques, OBE

**Chairman:** Alan Taylor

**Treasurer:** Francis Colella

**Membership Secretary:** John Hyde

**Newsletter Editor:** Bryan Sullivan

**Assistant Editor:** Richard Sullivan

**Website Manager:** Julie Hall

**Company Secretary:** Catherine Thorpe

### **Members of Council of Management:**

Alan Taylor (Chair)

Francis Colella

Michael Faruup

Julie Hall

John Hyde

Bryan Sullivan

Visit the Trust's website [www.staffs.org.uk](http://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*