

Staffordshire Gardens & Parks Trust

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News LETTER

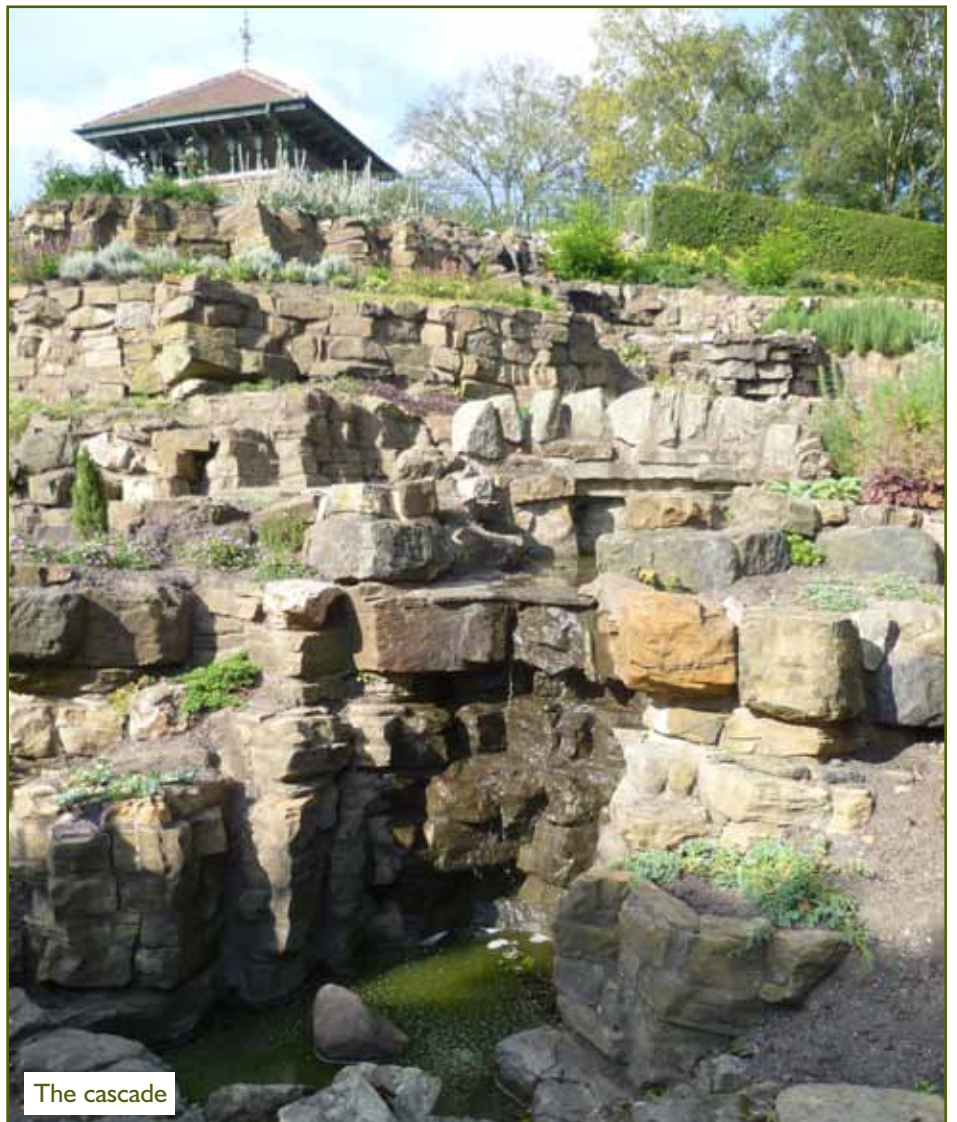
“BACK TO ITS FORMER GLORY!”

At half past four on the afternoon of August 30th, 1894, following a civic luncheon attended by 250 guests, the Mayor of Burslem, Alderman Spencer Lawton, led a procession seven thousand strong to Burslem Park behind a banner proclaiming “Success to Our Park”. After delivering a speech from the terrace, Cllr. Bowden, Chairman of the Baths and Parks Committee, with due ceremony unlocked the ornate gates with a silver-gilt key which he and his wife had donated.

On June 23rd, 2012, a re-enactment took place to celebrate the re-opening of Burslem Park following the recent restoration. As part of the ceremony a copy of the original banner was carried through the park with a few thousand in attendance

Various features of the new park were testimony to the munificence of local industrialists and the skill of local manufacturing: the two ornate terracotta fountains, were donated in memory of Arthur Wilkinson by his wife and daughters; gates, seats, shelters and drinking fountains made from terracotta were all donated by local industrialists.

The origins of the park can be traced to the development of the pottery and mining industries which had transformed and despoiled the landscape of the area; by the end of the nineteenth century, Burslem had become a thriving Potteries town. Its rapidly-expanding population lived in high-density terrace housing and the atmosphere was polluted by the high number of coal-fired kilns in the town. The City Fathers quickly recognised the need for a healthy work force, and the fashion for creating public parks caught their imagination.



The cascade



The pavilion

Thomas Mawson, the leading garden designer of the day, was initially employed to design Hanley Park, and the commission was then extended following a competition to design Burslem Park. The site chosen was colliery wasteland still dotted with numerous hidden mine shafts, all of which had to be filled and capped. The work of laying out the new park was undertaken by unemployed miners and pottery workers and entailed the importing of seventy loads of soil to cover up the spoil from the mines.

Most of Mawson's planting succumbed to industrial pollution, and it was difficult even to get the grass to thrive. The fountains had to be switched off only a year after they had been commissioned owing to subsidence, and in 1921 the lake drained away down an old airshaft!

By the 1980s and 1990s, the park was experiencing a period of neglect and slow decline, until, in 2001, growing local concern led to the formation of the Burslem Park Partnership, a voluntary organisation, supported by Stoke-on-Trent City Council, dedicated to the regeneration of Burslem Park. Beginning at first with small restoration projects,

such as restoring the cascades and the rose garden, and, in 2006, applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant to initiate the restoration.

The initial 'Round 1' application process commenced in 2007 with a Conservation plan produced by Ashmead Price which set out the history of the park and the budget cost of the park restoration. Local people were fully consulted on their preferences and priorities throughout the work stage. The application was successful, and The Heritage Lottery funded a 'Round 2' development stage of the project in 2009. A maintenance and management plan was developed, setting out a commitment to increased management of the park. In 2012, the Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a grant of £1.6 million towards the total project cost of £2.1 million, which was to include the restoration of the Pavilion.

Ashmead Price won the contract to deliver and supervise the restoration of the park, and, in May 2011, a contract was let by the City Council to G. F. Tomlinson of Derby to undertake the civil engineering and building restoration works. The one-year contract included

the restoration and repair of all the terracotta which has been such a distinctive feature of the Park.

Planting has been an important element in the restoration, and arrangements were made for contract-growing of the plants with two nurseries: Boultons of Moddeshall provided the herbaceous perennials and rockery plants, while the shrubs were supplied by Boningale Nurseries, Wolverhampton.

In future, the park will be at the centre of community activities, hosting popular events and encouraging local residents young and old to accept ownership of the park by involving themselves in its management and supervision.

The members of the Trust who took part in this visit were accompanied on the walk through the Park by Mike Watson, of the Burslem Park Partnership, and Sarah Ashmead, of Ashmead Price, who greatly enhanced the enjoyment of the afternoon by their first-hand knowledge of and their undoubted enthusiasm for this lovely park.



The heritage mosaic



Terracotta fountain at the main entrance

“PAXTON’S PROTÉGÉ”

This newly-published book by John Craddock chronicles the life of Edward Milner (1819 – 1884), apprentice gardener at Chatsworth, who was given the opportunity to study in Paris and became Paxton’s assistant and superintendent of the gardens of the re-located Crystal Palace at Sydenham.

After gaining design experience with Paxton, Milner set up his own firm, which later became “Milner White” and received commissions for work throughout the United Kingdom (in thirty-two counties) and abroad (in seventeen counties), working for titled people, MPs, local authorities, churches, prisons, barracks, power

stations, manufacturers (including Josiah Wedgwood), government departments, the RHS at Wisley and Chelsea, and the King of Sweden.

Other clients included H. G. Wells, Joseph Chamberlain and Norman Hartnell.

As well as the work for Wedgwood at Barlaston, Staffordshire sites connected with the firm include Hartshill Cemetery (1833-4), The Cedars, Stone (1917), Foremarke Hall, Burton (1915-8), Ingestre Hall (1937), Rangemore Hall, Tatenhill (1875), Sandon Hall (1913), Hill Top House, Stoke-on-Trent (1922) and Harestone,

6 Rowley Avenue, and Holmcroft Youth Club, both in Stafford, for George Venables (1950).

The book chronicles the development of one of the most significant landscape garden practices in this country since its establishment by ‘Paxton’s Protégé’.

Sue Gregory, November 2012

A copy of this book, which has been printed in a limited edition of 250 copies, may be obtained by sending a cheque for £20. 00 made out to “J. P. Craddock” at 9 Plash Drive, Stevenage, SG1 1LW. Postage and packing is free.

“A little sort of imitation Greek temple”

Whether P. G. Wodehouse had The Temple of Diana at Weston Park in mind when he was describing the temple in the grounds of Blandings Castle is a matter of conjecture (his family lived for a time at Stableford), but it was certainly erected “in the days when landowners went in for little sort of imitation Greek temples”, orangeries in particular being in vogue in the second half of the eighteenth-century.



An unusual rounded door

Designed by James Paine, who also worked at Chillington Hall, where he designed the Gothic and Grecian Temples, it was built in 1760 on ground which gave a commanding view of Capability Brown’s landscape,

not visible from the house, and of the Cleve Hills and The Wrekin beyond. The Temple of Diana served a number of purposes; apart from being an orangery, it also combined a tea room with panels painted with scenes depicting the life of Diana, Goddess of Hunting, an octagonal music room and a dairy, above which was “an exceeding good bedchamber” for the dairy-maid.

This last amenity, coupled with the fact that it was such a distance from the house and that there was no water-course nearby, has encouraged speculation as to whether its true purpose was not to provide a convenient rendezvous for the Earl’s liaison with its occupant, dairy-maids at that time having a strong romantic appeal!

The rooms behind the orangery have now been converted into a dwelling, at present tenanted by

Jeffrey Haworth, the Chairman of the Hereford and Worcester Gardens Trust, who gave members the privilege of a guided tour of what is now his home, and the Trust is most grateful to Jeffrey for providing such an enjoyable and memorable afternoon.



The Chairman speaks - Jeffrey listens!

A Walk Round Trentham Park

Led by Michael Walker, Head of Garden and Estate, and Greg Williamson, Estate Supervisor, twenty-two of the Trust's most hardy members followed a challenging circular route round the parkland at Trentham. Two hours became four, but, throughout, the party remained undaunted by mud and steep slopes, their attention riveted by the account given by Michael and Greg of the ambitious enterprise in the historic North Park which, when completed, will be one of the Woodland Trust's sixty Diamond Woods marking the sixty years in which Queen Elizabeth II has reigned as our monarch.

The project began with the removal of the pine tree forest which had been planted as a commercial crop half a century ago and will continue with the re-planting of the area with native sessile oak at the end of this year. Selective thinning will reveal more of the eighteenth-century rides and paths beneath the present sprawl of natural regeneration, and restore the parkland to its eighteenth-century character. The bracken which at present infests the area will this year be attacked with chemicals and thereafter kept under control by the possible introduction of red poll cattle, the future use of chemicals being banned by the EU.

Trentham was first mentioned in the Domesday Book, and an eleventh-century priory once stood on the site. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth-century, the priory was replaced by a Tudor house. Successively remodelled over the next two centuries, it was finally remodelled by Charles Barry at the same time that he was laying out the gardens, 1834-47. After Staffordshire County Council had declined to take it over – it might have become the campus of Staffordshire's first university -, the Hall was demolished in 1911, pollution from the Potteries having made it uninhabitable, and the family sold their estates here and in Shropshire, retaining only the ancestral home of the Sutherland clan, Dunrobin Castle, in Sutherland. For the next hundred years Trentham became a place of public respite, its best-known feature being perhaps the 1930s Arts-and-Craft lido, still fondly remembered by older Potteries residents.

The estate was later sold to John Broome, the entrepreneur behind the development of Alton Towers as a premier leisure attraction. He



then began its development as a leisure park, having sold the most northerly section of the park to create Trentham Park Golf Course, but, in 1984, the National Coal Board bought the estate so that it could make good the damage done to the lake and gardens by mining subsidence

St. Modwen Properties purchased the estate from British Coal in 1996 and, following a protracted planning procedure which ensured that conservation and ecological issues as well as local sensibilities were balanced against the demands of landscape management, began a ten-year plan to restore and develop both the Garden and Estate five years later. The first phase included the creation of a commercial shopping village incorporating a premier garden centre by Blue Diamond and the Premier Inn hotel. At the same time, the structure of the estate was restored, including ecological and landscape conservation throughout the estate, together with Barry's Italian Garden, compete with loggia, balustrading and fountains. Vast new perennial plantings were commissioned to make a contemporary contribution to

Trentham's continuing evolution. The plantings were designed by Tom Stuart-Smith, with supporting borders on either side by Piet Oudolf, both of whom are garden designers of international reputation.

The second phase of development coupled additional shops and restaurants within the shopping village with an iconic contemporary garden designed by Piet Oudolf in the eastern Pleasure Garden. It is still intended to build a five-star hotel on the footprint of the demolished Hall, but this ambitious project will need substantial investment and has, for the time being, been put on hold. Following initial work by Elizabeth Banks Associates, a long-term restoration and management plan was drawn up by a team from Land Use Consultants led by Dominic Cole, who had previously worked at the Eden Project and the Lost Gardens of Heligan, whilst to this pool of talents were added those of Michael Walker, who took up the appointment of Garden Manager in 2003, having worked at Waddesdon Manor for the previous nine years.

Meanwhile, in sixty acres of the parkland at the southern end of the estate, Trentham Monkey Forest provides a unique visitor attraction within the UK and is home to 140 Barbary macaques.

Today, Trentham Gardens are one of the UK's premier tourist attractions; last year there were 3.2m. visitors to Trentham, of whom 400, 000 paid to enter the gardens.

During the period 1759-1780 Lancelot Brown worked at Trentham three times, removing formal features including two of the three avenues. This was confirmed by a contemporary witness Viscount Torrington who commented that Brown was 'too severe upon avenues'. The line of the most southerly of the three avenues was retained and extended by Brown to form his Green Drive which led through twin lodges to the new entrance at Strongford. A further revision, this time by Barry, brought the line of the central avenue back into use as a carriage drive leading through Gravel Pit Lodge towards the road to the family's Shropshire estate. W. A. Nesfield was employed to landscape this drive and his plan specified large limes and elms

informally placed near the west entrance to the hall and that the ground on each side of the drive should be sloped upwards. It took the Duke two years to decide on which of the two recommended gradients should be implemented, eventually he settled on 1:4 as this would be cheaper.¹

Our itinerary took the group up through King's Wood via the steep route of the early eighteenth-century Beech Avenue (which was fully displaying all its autumnal glory) which Brown had retained and which replaced an earlier Fir Tree Avenue dating from circa 1599, which was itself destroyed by a hurricane.

Kings Wood was once known as Trentham Coppy, when it was managed to supply coppiced timber for estate use, the surplus being sold as cratewood for the pottery manufacturers such as Josiah Spode. The two oldest paths, known to have been in place by 1599 but probably medieval, led from the hall to Hanchurch in the north west and Beech in the south west. Three avenues were added in between these paths at the beginning of the 18th century which were entirely ornamental as they did not lead

anywhere but would have provided vistas. About twenty years later, rides were cut through the Coppy which were intended to provide views to local features.

Finally, the group returned down the line of this drive and concluding a very informative commentary on the progress of the work, Michael said that when completed, ten thousand trees will have been planted, many through an imaginative sponsorship scheme through which, for just £15, members of the public can plant a tree in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a significant event in their lives. In doing so, they will be supporting a most worthy cause, The Douglas Macmillan Cancer Support who have already received £27, 000 from the Trentham Tree Dedication Initiative to date.

Members left determined to return in five years' time when the project will have been completed, although Michael has promised that, in twelve months, the site would be looking substantially different.

¹ Sue Gregory 'The Historic Gardens at Trentham', *Transactions of Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, XLIV, 2010.



Foundations of WWII hut, part of Trentham's heritage

Blithfield Hall

Blithfield Hall stands on high ground between two rivers, the River Blythe, from which takes its name, and the River Trent, and from where it commands extensive views over the neighbouring countryside, which now includes the Blithfield Reservoir, opened by Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 1953.



The North Front

No trace remains of the original moated mansion which once stood on the site, nor of the village mentioned in the Domesday Book. The present Hall dates back to the sixteenth century, but was extended in the 1740s and remodelled in the fashionable Gothick style by John Buckler for the second Lord Bagot in the 1820s which has given it its distinctive turrets and battlements. Buckler, who also worked for Lord Bagot at Pool Park, in Denbighshire, is best known nowadays as a topographical artist whose drawings of now-demolished or radically-altered buildings are a valuable source of information on the history of British

architecture (Some of his drawings are to be found in The William Salt Library, in Stafford).

Like many other historic estates, Blithfield Hall suffered a decline in the next century, the greater part of it becoming virtually uninhabitable, since it lacked basic amenities like bathrooms, electricity and heating other than open fires.

When, in 1938, the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company decided to buy the Hall and most of the estate in order to create Blithfield Reservoir, the Hall even faced the prospect of demolition, a fate from which it was

almost certainly spared when, in 1948, Caryl, the Sixth Baron, bought back the Hall and thirty acres of land surrounding the Hall and, aided by grants from The Historic Buildings Council, he and Lady Bagot set about the task of rescuing it from dereliction.

A condition for accepting the grant was that, in return for receiving public funding, which had allowed the roof to be replaced and dry rot to be eliminated, the Hall should open its doors to the public, and, between 1956 and 1977, the principal rooms were re-decorated and displays of costumes and clothes put on show.



The eighteenth-century Orangery

Members of the public were able to enjoy the splendours of one of the oldest of Staffordshire's stately homes.

Sadly, this privilege ended when The Historic Buildings Grant withdrew its funding and the expense of opening to the public became too great for the family to sustain, and the Hall is now divided into four separate properties, the main rooms being in the ownership of the Bagot Jewitt Trust, while Nancy Lady Bagot and the Bagot Jewitt family remain in residence.

Happily, members of the Trust had the opportunity of visiting the Hall this September, when Cosy Bagot Jewitt, whose husband, Charles, Chief Executive of the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, is custodian of the Hall, conducted them round the principal rooms of the Hall before entertaining them to tea in the Great Hall.

Much of the Hall's earlier magnificence remains in evidence: the Great Hall, which may date back to the fifteenth

century, though extensively re-modelled since, and notable for its Regency Gothic plasterwork by Francis Bernasconi, one of the most successful carvers and ornamental plasterers in Georgian England; the Drum Hall, so called because a drum rather than a gong was used to summon the family to meals (a custom that once caused alarm amongst Cavalier soldiers billeted at the Hall during the English Civil Wars, who thought that it was a call to arms!); the Chinese Room with its eighteenth-century Chinese wallpaper; the Great Staircase, which dates from the time of Charles II.

But what special attractions does Blithfield Hall offer the garden historian? Well, for a start, this is one of the estates which 'Capability' Brown did not 'improve'! The park has never been landscaped, and several ancient oaks survive.

Other well-known names are associated with Blithfield, however. In 1704, the fourth Baronet commissioned George London and Henry Wise to lay out the

west garden, though it is not certain how much of their design was ever implemented, and nothing now remains of it today.

An estate map dating back to the early eighteenth-century shows that there was once a parterre, a patte d'oeil and a wilderness, all features associated with Charles Bridgeman and Stephen Switzer, though there is no evidence that either actually contributed to their design.

What does survive is the very fine Orangery which dates from the 1770s and which once housed an exhibition of the Bagot coaches. It was designed by James 'Athenian' Stuart, who was also employed by Thomas Anson at Shugborough and by the first Lord Lytton at Hagley, which the Trust will be visiting next year..

The underground chamber beneath the Orangery presented members with a challenge as to deciding its original purpose; uses suggested included a plunge bath and a cheese store!

The afternoon also included a visit to St. Leonard's Church. The present St. Leonard's, which stands just over 100 yards from the house, dates from the late thirteenth century with fourteenth and fifteenth-century additions, though it replaces an older church mentioned in the Domesday Book. In the nineteenth century, the chancel was heavily restored in the medieval style by George Edmund Street, one of the most prominent ecclesiastical architects of the Victorian era, and not much survives of the original medieval work, though the oak roof, restored in 1853, is an exact copy of the original. However, the wooden pews are believed to be four hundred years old and offer visitors the best

collection of medieval bench ends in Staffordshire.

Another rare feature is the double and triple sedilia. The interior contains many magnificent memorials to the Bagot Family; continuing the Bagot family's association with the church, Charles Bagot-Jewitt is one of the church organists.

This proved to be a popular visit, and the Trust is extremely grateful not only to Cosy for her hospitality, but also to its Chairman, Alan Taylor, who conducted the party around the church, enhancing the interest of the visit with his extensive knowledge of church architecture.



The carved Jacobean staircase

A Date for your Diary

Wilkins Pleck, in North Staffordshire, is a modern garden in the Arts and Crafts tradition covering six acres, whose features include a formal parterre, formal yew hedges, a knot garden, a pleached lime avenue and a timber loggia fronting a rectangular pool.

The creation of Chris and Sheila Bissell, it has been included by "The Reader's Digest" amongst 'the most amazing gardens in Britain and Ireland', its colours,

according to Tim Mowl, 'worthy of Hidcote', and in the NGS Yellow Book as 'a kaleidoscope of colour and creativity'.

The Trust will be visiting Wilkins Pleck, which is at Whitmore, near Newcastle, on Saturday, January 20th, 2013.

Details of this visit, together with the full programme of summer visits in 2013, will be sent to members shortly.

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Acknowledgment

This issue of the Newsletter has been put together by the Trust's Editorial Committee – Francis Colella, Bryan Sullivan and Alan Taylor – with additional help from Sarah Ashmead, Sue Gregory, Cosy Bagot Jewitt, Howard Price and Michael Walker, to whom the Committee offers grateful thanks.

Earlier issues of the Newsletter may be viewed by visiting the Trust's website:

www.staffordshiregardensandparks.org