

Friends of Leicestershire & Rutland Gardens Trust

Newsletter 19

Spring 2007

Registered Charity no.1063075

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Once again the weather is being unpredictable this year which adds to the joys (or woes) of gardening. Fortunately we were blessed with fine weather for the visit to Renishaw Hall, where we enjoyed an excellent guided tour with the head gardener.

Our spring lectures included a lecture by Richard Welburn on Leicester's parks and open spaces. This was postponed from last Autumn. The lecture passed off quite well despite the lack of a power-point presentation due to an uncooperative computer. The second lecture by Andy Wimble on Bramham Park was most interesting and I hope that members were encouraged to join the trip to Bramham on the 1st July.

I am pleased to report that the study day the LRGT put on at Rufford on the 15th May went off successfully. The feedback that we have received has been positive and has spurred further research into the gardens at Rufford. I would like to thank all those involved in organising the day particularly Sue Blaxland who carried out most of the organisation and liaison with the staff at Rufford Abbey. Without Sue's input the study day would not have happened.

I look forward to seeing you during the course of the summer at one of the events in the programme.

Stephen Barker
Chairman

EVENTS

Autumn Lecture

The Autumn Lecture this year should have been given by Richard Welburn on the management and future of our Public Parks and Openspaces, however at the last moment our speaker realised at short notice that he was doubled booked and could not come. However, Sue Blaxland very kindly stepped into the breach and delivered a very informative and learned lecture on Gertrude Jekyll, who had initially wanted to be a painter and attended the Slade School of Art, but poor vision prevented this and she turned to gardening instead. Jekyll changed the face of English Gardening by sweeping away formal Victorian planting and replacing it with mixed borders of herbaceous plants. Her sense of colour played an all important role in her garden design. Together with Sir Edwin Lutyens she designed seventy gardens and many more on her own. She also found time to design a banner for the suffragettes. We were shown splendid slides, particularly of Hestercombe.

It was a most enjoyable evening and many, many thanks are due to Sue for stepping in at the last minute.

Friends Evening

At our Friends evening in November we had three short Presentations and an excellent exhibition of photographs, including Peter Rawson's stunning record of our trip to Scotland in June 2006.. Rowan gave the first one entitled DEATH OF THE FRONT GARDEN in which she expressed her concerns regarding the number of front gardens being slabbed over to park the car. This has a twofold effect, the first being the obvious aesthetic one and the other being the loss of biodiversity caused by the loss of plants and shrubs and lack of drainage for rainwater. Sue then told us about a visit to ASHBY CASTLE to look at the excavation of the Tudor garden. This has now been recorded by the Archaeologists and will be filled in. It is not known at this time whether any further work will be done, however, they were pleased to have seen what remained when it had been uncovered. (See Newsletter 19) The third presentation of the evening was by Stephen entitled MY HOLIDAY SNAPS, not a very inspiring title you may think, but Stephen had been to Russia with the Architectural Association so his slides were particularly interesting and his talk both witty and informative . All were well received and Rowan's talk led to a short piece in the Mercury which generated interest from the Civic Society. Wigston Civic Society have asked us to give them a talk about front gardens and Rowan and I have agreed to do this. I was really sorry that the evening was not well attended as the atmosphere was good and the evening an example of what a Friends Evening should be i.e. contributions from Friends of the Trust. I await your offerings for November 2007.

Elizabeth Bacon

AGM and Lecture: "The Future and Management of Public Parks"

This lecture by Richard Welburn was postponed from last autumn, but was well worth the wait.

Richard, who is Head of Parks and Green Spaces for Leicester City Council, told us that the Council manages 1637 hectares of parks and green spaces and that this comprises 22% of the City area. It is broken down into City Parks, District Parks (of which there are 10, including Victoria Park) and 'green spaces', which are incidental open spaces. This percentage of open space is a source of considerable pride to the City.

He has a budget of £5.3 million to maintain and manage all this and a staff of only 153 personnel. 20 years ago, the staffing levels were at least double and the income was 53% higher.

He explained that there had been a major review in 2002 which had resulted in a significant investment of £2.7 million and a programme of improvements had started. A major change was that the management of parks had devolved away from New Walk and there were now five locally-based management and maintenance teams, including Victoria Park, Abbey Park and Evington Park. He felt that this had been a very positive step and that, as a result of this, there had been a gradual improvement in the standard of maintenance.

He felt that community links were vital to the regeneration of parks and that these fell into two categories: parks user groups (which were informal) and 'friends' groups (which were formally constituted). The latter can attract funding to improve facilities. For example, the Knighton Park Friends had attracted £54,000 of external funding and Bronte Close in Braunstone, £39,000. Funds such as these can be used to install children's play equipment and other facilities. He spoke about

education, where his department were working closely with schools, supporting the National Curriculum.

Partnership working was definitely the way of the future.

His talk addressed issues such as cleanliness – where there had been an improvement – and crime levels. There was a public perception that parks were unsafe but, in fact, only 3.1% of recorded crime occurs in parks. Close work with local policing units had resulted in a 15% reduction in crime and simple measures, such as trimming back vegetation in Abbey Park, gave reassurance to the public. People wanted to see more visible park staff and 24 new parks officers had now been appointed. These are accredited by the police and have powers of enforcement. He would like this number to increase.

He felt that media coverage of parks had improved considerably and that there were many more positive reports. There had been an improvement in marketing and publicity material. The City Centre had entered the 'Britain in Bloom' competition last year, had won the East Midlands regional title and been awarded a Silver Medal by the RHS.

Sue Blaxland

London Squares Weekend

Regretfully this weekend has been cancelled as there was insufficient interest. However, we are not giving up on our short breaks and in the very near future Elizabeth and Sue will be in touch with Travel Editions to discuss plans for a visit to France in 2008. At this stage it is likely that the visit will include Versailles and other important sites close to Paris. We hope the details will be available late Summer/early Autumn

Elizabeth Bacon

Study Day at Rufford Country Park

The Study Day was a great success and a write up will appear in the next Newsletter. Sue Blaxland organised the event and we thank her for all the hard work that went into ensuring such an enjoyable and interesting day.

Forthcoming Events

June 27th Evening visit to the garden of Glebe House, Hoby

(See separate sheet for directions and visit details)

This year's evening garden visit is to Diane and Steve Horsfield's garden in Hoby.

The garden:

They moved to Glebe House in October 1994 and have been slowly developing the garden since then. The garden, which was originally the kitchen gardens to the rectory next door, consists of almost an acre. Beyond the garden are extensive views across rolling Leicestershire farmland.

Their aim for the garden has been to develop a number of different styles and rooms within the overall design. These include; a large pond forming an Italianate room, a Japanese influenced bed, shaded woodland areas, several water features, small vegetable and soft fruit areas, pleached limes, and large herbaceous borders, many of which have been replanted in recent years. The planting schemes are mostly mixed with shrubs, old roses and herbaceous plants.

Historical:

Glebe House was built in 1727 (The date can be seen on the wall adjacent to the front garden of the Rectory). It was originally the coach house and stables to the Rectory. The previous owners converted it in the early 70's, an extension was added in 1977 and a conservatory in 2006.



The garden wall is early 18th century and enclosed the Rectory kitchen gardens. It consists of a double wall with internal cavity. This method of construction allowed the wall to be heated to protect frost sensitive fruit trees that were grown against it. The site of the fireplaces can still be seen. The vine on the wall originally grew into a glass house whose base has been used to construct the pergola. Other survivors from the Rectory gardens are the magnificent walnut tree (thought to be over 200 years old), two old apple trees (unknown varieties) and a ha-ha. The lake in the field beyond was originally the fishponds for the Rectory. .

Hoby church (also open) was built in the troubled years following the death of King John in 1216. The bases of the piers in the nave suggest that it was built on the site of an older church. The nave is original and the clerestory was added in the 14th century. The “poppy head” benches, now in the aisles, are 15th century. The tower dates from the 13th century and the spire was added later.

Steve Horsfield

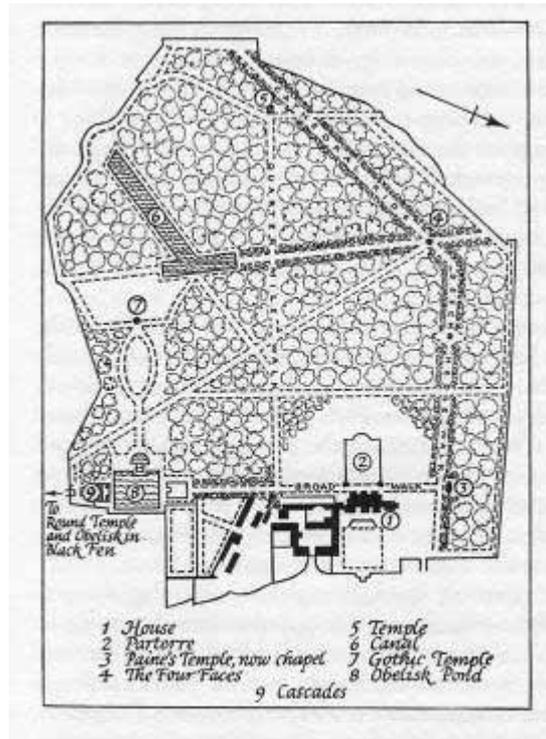
Sunday July 1st, Coach Trip to Bramham Park, Yorkshire

(See separate sheet for details of visit)

Bramham Park, Yorkshire.

The Spring lecture this year was given by Andy Wimble who will be acting as our guide when we visit on the 1st July.

Bramham Park is an important Park as it is one of the most complete examples of an early Eighteenth Century landscape. Unlike so many country estates it was not remodelled into the landscape style developed by Capability Brown. The park reflects the influence of contemporary French Gardens with clipped Beech hedges lining avenues through the woods. In total the Beech hedges amount to two miles in length. In the past two men would have been employed to keep them cut throughout the year; with the aid of modern machinery the task takes about ten weeks.



Plan of the gardens

The vistas created by the avenues are terminated by a variety of focal points including small temple buildings, statues and urns in a variety of styles including Tuscan, Ionic and Gothic. It is worth noting that the Park is not planned symmetrically around the house as it would have been in France but is asymmetrical with views leading out into the surrounding countryside, foreshadowing the later Landscape movement. These views are used to link the main garden to the pleasure grounds in Black Fen, which are separated by open countryside. On the west side of the house a long avenue leads from the North Garden House past the garden front of the house along the line of the Cascades across a small valley looking to the Round House and the Obelisk beyond. It is a magnificent vista and well worth seeing.



Other main features of the garden are the water works in the landscape. In particular the T-pond which gives an excellent view of the house, which, on a still clear day, is reflected in its water. The other is the Cascade which runs down a gentle slope leading to a large pool. From this, another cascade leads down the slope of the valley which separates the main garden from Black Fen. An interesting feature of the cascades is the strange heads with bat wings which act as spouts for the water.

It is two years since I last visited Bramham Park where I spent several hours roaming the Gardens; I look forward to seeing them again and to see the progress in the restoration work on the building known as the Old Museum, which is a Gothic Structure set in an enclosed garden surrounded by tall hedges within the main garden. For anyone who has not been I strongly recommend you join us on the trip to Bramham where we will be accompanied by Andy who is both knowledgeable and enthusiastic.

Stephen Barker

Sunday, 19th August Village Walk

Our village walk this year will be around Hungarton and is being led by Sue Scutt. Full details later.

Research and Recording Group

Following our meeting last year with Jon Kenny, the then project manager for the Parks and Database Partnership, we invited Patricia Shepherd, Volunteer Coordinator for this area, to visit us in March.



We started the day with a visit to the Botanic Garden and then had a working lunch. The day was very informative and we are beginning to feel that we are now on the right track to get some of our research ready for the database. As a result we have started revisiting parks, with a view to getting our research into the required format. There is a long way to go but it is rewarding to know, that at long last, we are making progress.

Deborah Martin

Garden Archaeology at Kenilworth Castle

We reported in the Autumn 2005 Newsletter on a garden archaeology project that was being undertaken by English Heritage to try to uncover the remains of a garden that Robert Dudley created for a visit by Queen Elizabeth in 1575. A contemporary description of the garden and of the Queen's visit was written in a letter by Robert Laneham, who was one of Dudley's ushers.

During the 2005 dig (which was visited by some members of the Research and Recording Group), work was concentrated on one half of the site and revealed possible foundations for a stone fountain and an obelisk. The other half of the site was excavated during the summer of 2006, and we gained the impression that little of significance was discovered. The archaeologists suspected that the garden might have been a temporary construction, built for the Royal visit, rather like a Chelsea Show Garden.

However, this has proved not to be the case. Two stone culverts, leading to and from the fountain, were discovered. There were also fragments of white marble, confirming that Laneham's description of a very elaborate Renaissance fountain was accurate. It was likely that it was carved in Northern Italy and imported in pieces, to be re-erected at Kenilworth.

In rubble-filled pits to the east and west of the fountain, the dig uncovered what appear to have been bases for some timber elements, such as obelisks – also mentioned by Laneham. There was also a great aviary, but no trace of this remains. The excavations have also revealed the overall dimensions of the original Elizabethan garden, slightly smaller than the area of the Elizabethan-style beds laid out in this area in the 1970's.

Subject to planning permission, English Heritage will start work on the re-creation of the garden in late summer 2007. The first stage of the work will involve the formation of the terraces and layout of the paths. Planting will start in the autumn and the rest of the architectural features, including the fountain, aviary, terrace steps and arbours will be installed in spring 2008, ready for opening in the summer.

Sue Blaxland

Litchborough Gardens, Northampton shire, off the A5 just S of Weedon

Litchborough Gardens including those of the Hall will be open, under the Yellow Book Scheme on Sunday 3rd June. I was fortunate enough to be invited to a Charity Lunch at the Hall last Autumn. I was very impressed with the Hall, its gardens, the village and the church and recommend it as well worth a visit. I will probably go again.

Elizabeth Bacon

Obituary

Daphne Sheldon died on 26th March after a short illness. Daphne was a loyal friend going on many visits and attending lectures. Some of you will have seen her at the Spring Lecture only days before she died.

AGT

Meeting with the AGT Education Officer

Early in March members of the committee met with Juliet Wilmott, AGT Education Officer. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how County Gardens Trusts can help schools develop an interest in horticulture. A Government initiative is in the pipeline to encourage pupils to grow vegetables and as a result of this a lot of help and advice is becoming available from the Government, LEAs and the RHS. At the moment we are too short on man-power to develop this area, but if anyone out there is interested in this project please contact one of the committee.

AGT Events

The following are taken from the e-newsletter Spring 2007.

Lyveden New Bield & Prebendal Manor

Lincolnshire GT visit on **Thursday 14 June 2006**. Lyveden New Bield has one of the oldest gardens in England. The tour will be led by Mark Bradshaw, the NT property manager. Prebendal Manor has recreated medieval gardens and the afternoon will include a guided tour of the house and gardens. For further details or to book, please contact Stephanie Lee on marigoldlee@btinternet.com, or telephone 01507 442151. Tickets cost £25 members or £30.00 non-members.

Cottesbrooke Hall and Gardens

Bedfordshire GT visit on **Thursday 19 July 2007**. Further information and tickets from Dorothy Richards, 6 Bromham Road, Biddenham, Bedford MK40 1AF. Tickets: Members £15, Non-members £18 to include tour of the house and garden.

Nottingham University Gardens

Derbyshire HGT visit on **Saturday 21 July 2007** will be guided by Ian Cook, the Grounds Manager. Contact Gwendoline Spencer at The Croft, Boggy Lane, Church Broughton, DE65 5AR

Brook Cottage, Alkerton, near Banbury.

Oxfordshire Gardens Trust visit on **Saturday 21 July**. 2.30pm Four-acre plantsman's garden, created since 1964. Mixed plantings, and, of course, a brook. Tickets (with directions) must be booked in advance from: John Shortland, Glyme Cottage, Radford Bridge, Enstone, Oxon OX7 4EA or 01608 678145 or mobile 07774 889279. Price:£6.50 to include delicious tea and cakes.

For further details The Association of Gardens Trusts

e-mail: agt@gardens-trusts.org.uk

London Office: 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ

Tel: 0209 7251 2610 Fax: 020 7251 2610 Website: www.gardenstrusts.org.uk