

LEICESTERSHIRE
AND RUTLAND
GARDENS
TRUST



www.lrgt.org

Newsletter

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Champagne at Winter Lunch to celebrate increase in membership!



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Chairman's Notes

With the change in the clocks bringing forward the longer days, spring truly feels that it has arrived, despite the persistence of cold winds. For me, the longer days mean that I have the opportunity to spend some time in the garden in the evenings after work, rather than having to fit it in at the weekend with everything else. The arrival of spring seems to indicate the start of a new gardening year, with trees and shrubs coming into blossom and the flowering of spring bulbs; the drive to work is enhanced by the hedgerows covered in the white flowers of the blackthorn.

For the Trust, we have recently held our AGM where we were able to mark a year of solid achievement. The membership drive based on a Friend bring a Friend has resulted in a near doubling of our membership. My thanks go to all those involved and I extend a warm welcome to all our new members.

Special thanks go to our Treasurer, Steve Horsfield, for his work in obtaining a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which has enabled the Trust to create its own website and to purchase new projection equipment for use at meetings. This has been a great step forward and I would strongly urge any member who has not seen the website to logon and pay a visit.

The Research Group has made great progress over the past year. In 2008, the Group successfully completed a research project on Launde Abbey and has entered details of a number of sites onto the Parks and Gardens Database. I am pleased to say that, at the AGT Council Meeting in March, the Trust was praised by Rachael Sturgeon, Project Manager, for its work in entering information onto the Database and in training up volunteers to do this without external assistance.

As ever, the core of the Trust's activities is the programme of lectures and visits, for which we owe thanks to the hard work of Elizabeth Bacon. I am sure that all members of the Trust will join me in wishing Elizabeth a full recuperation from her hip operation. The 2009 programme has got off to an excellent start with the trip to Cambridge and Anglesey Abbey. We have also had an interesting lecture by Kate Harwood on the Indian influence on English gardens, a neglected topic that does not get wide coverage, which is curious when one considers how the length of time the two countries have been connected.

Looking forward, we have an interesting and varied programme of events. The Celebrity Lecture with Anna Pavord on the topic of 'Why Garden?' should be of special interest. It is generally taken for granted that gardening is a good thing, without really thinking why we do it. I understand that there are still some tickets available for members and their friends if you have not already booked.

Following on from the success we had in recruiting new members at Hoby last year, we have decided to have a stand at Foxton Open Gardens on June 14th and at the Rutland Hardy Plant Fair on May 24th. We are looking for volunteers to assist us in attracting new members and to explain the work of the Trust to the wider public. If you could spare an hour to help man the stand and chat to members of the public, the committee would like to hear from you. This is not as daunting as it may sound, as the people you will be talking to are interested in gardens.

It just remains for me to wish you success in your own gardens this year and I look forward to seeing you at some of the events on the programme. I would remind you that we on the committee are always happy to receive your comments on the Trust's activities and your

suggestions for future visits and lectures. We also look forward to members' contributions at the Friends Evening in November, so if you are visiting somewhere of interest either home or abroad, perhaps you could think of doing a short presentation to your fellow members.

Stephen Barker, Chairman

Membership update.

At present we have 145 members, which is a very pleasing result of our Friend Get Friend campaign last year. Seven new members have already joined us in the current year and I welcome them and look forward to meeting them at our events this year. Three of our new members used our new website, so that is also very satisfying for us.

Newbold Verdon Gardening Club have joined us as an Association and will send two members as their representatives, although other members of their club will be very welcome guests.



Diane Horsfield receives her champagne

Sue Blaxland, Elizabeth Bacon, Sheila Burnage, Diane Horsfield and Mr and Mrs Colin Clarke all received champagne, or sherry in Elizabeth's case, for being successful in persuading friends to join us. The Association of Garden Trusts has told us that Surrey and Hertfordshire are going to set up a similar campaign, but we have refused to let them borrow Sue Blaxland. I hope you will continue to all help us gain new members and I will be happy to send or give you some of our leaflets which include details of our programme of events and the website address.

Irene Jones

Our Lottery Grant update

As part of our membership drive in 2008 we recognized the potential benefits of having a website for the LRGF. We thus applied and were awarded a National Lottery grant of £4950, for the provision of a website and improved multimedia equipment. Since then we have designed and developed our website, which can be seen at www.lrgt.org on the Internet.

The website provides Friends with information on our programme of events and acts as an archive for photos, newsletters and research reports. In addition it is now possible to access our library of old postcards of Leicestershire and Rutland. We will soon have over 400 postcards online. Most importantly, the site is attracting interest in the Trust. The general public are visiting it, often via searches in Google, and we now have several new members who found us via the website.

As well as the website we have purchased a new data projector, computer and projector stand and will be buying a new screen.

Steve Horsfield

Events

Our increasing membership has meant that we can arrange more coach trips without the risk of losing money, so this year we have arranged five, the first being the successful winter garden trip in February. Up until 2007, we had used Alan Smith Coaches of Market Harborough which proved very satisfactory, but, with the change of ownership, things were not so satisfactory. We are now using Woods who, so far, seem fine.

The other effect of the increase is that we have had to find other premises for our lectures, the Octagon Room becoming too small, as maximum capacity is 50 people. With the invaluable help of Malcolm and Jennifer Elliot we will be using The Friends Meeting House from March 2010. I will be sorry to leave the Octagon Room as we have had some very enjoyable evenings there; it has a good atmosphere and the social side of the Trust has developed with our tea and wonderful homemade cakes.

In 2008 we introduced two new events, the winter garden visit, which will become a regular fixture, and the coffee morning. The latter is an opportunity for new Friends to meet and to raise money against any future losses. This year, it is Sunday morning, August 2nd, in Sue Blaxland's garden.

Two of our events were, I felt, a little disappointing, mainly because prior briefings were ignored, but, in spite of those, I think we had an enjoyable and interesting year. On some occasions we did have some very heavy rain, but this did not necessarily spoil things; serving Pimms in the porch of Whissendine Church was really quite fun. Perhaps the highlight of the year for some was the trip to France, where we managed to see a variety of gardens, formal gardens, and public open spaces. The Spring Lecturer, Jane Balfour was a very happy chance as she will now act as our guide to four gardens for our Salisbury trip.

I wish to thank those of you who responded to my bullying by writing up our events. If anyone wishes to volunteer for future events, just let me know, as we do like to have your view of visits and lectures. Tickets are going well for the Anna Pavord lecture, but there are still some left, so tell your friends and neighbours.

Plans are going ahead for 2010; two lectures are already booked and plans made for various visits. In the very near future we hope to meet with Travel Editions to arrange our next holiday, which will be based in Rome. Several Friends have suggested a visit to Highgrove and I am pleased to tell you that, in the next three years, we will receive an invitation for a party of 25 Friends. We already have some arrangements made for 2011. Tim Mowl, best known for his work in Bath, will talk in the spring and lead a garden tour in the summer, while Chris Beardshaw will be our Celebrity Lecturer.

We are compiling a list of possible visits and speakers for future reference and your ideas would be very welcome. Thank you for your support throughout the year and I hope you will enjoy this year's programme.

Elizabeth Bacon

Packwood House and Baddesley Clinton, Saturday August 9th 2008

A lightly trafficked Midlands motorway system brought us to within spitting distance of the first of two medieval houses of the “lesser gentry” a few minutes short of an hour. However, Mother Nature found it necessary to make the metaphor reality and welcomed us with showers and dull skies.

The Grade 1 listed Packwood House was introduced to us with an interesting and somewhat anecdotal talk wherein it transpired that the “Great Hall” was an early barn conversion and



the “Long Gallery” was an inter-war addition to connect the Hall with the rest of the house, both successfully achieved with the help of architectural “salvage”. The result we now see, a “romantic vision of a Tudor House”, is, to this visitor, an excellent example of how to catch the essence of the period, avoiding the excessive exuberance of many of the similar Victorian essays. The core living areas were domestic in scale, and generated a comfortable homeliness when compared with the opulence of many mansions scattered about the kingdom.



The gardens well reflect the status of the various owners, from the plunge pools, the sunken garden and the famed topiary in the Yew Garden (said by some to represent the Sermon on the Mount) of the Featherston era, to the modern herbaceous borders the layout of which is based on records showing arrangements from earlier times. This is all managed with the assistance of 3½ gardeners, so says the RHS Gardens Finder, which recommends July and August as the best time to see the herbaceous borders – it is spot on. The planting seems eclectic in as much as, amongst the Mulleins and Crocosmias and the like, one finds Aeoniums (natives of the **Canaries**) and, **peeping through a mass of** brightly coloured flowers, the diminutive bluish-purple heads of a *Thalictrum*. Along one wall, the beds were divided by clipped hedging

reminiscent of a similar feature at Bidduph Grange. If only the sun had shown its face!

And so on to Baddesley Clinton, just a few minutes down the road. Alliteratively described as a Moated Mediaeval Manor House, it has, none the less, been much modified over the years. The visit started with lunch, an excellent Ploughmans, and, in my case, a beer from a local brewery. It seems the National Trust has a policy of offering local brews at



its properties, expensive though they are! Then followed another interesting and anecdotal introduction in which Groby was correctly pronounced! The reference thereto was the Ferrers family whose property Baddesley Clinton was, from the 16th century up until the Second World War. The house, like Packwood, is largely domestic in scale though perhaps lacking some of the comfortable feeling found at the latter pile. However, its particular peculiarity, after the 13th Century Moat, which was later widened, is the existence of not one but three priest holes, one of which was formed from the kitchen sewer. These facilities were needed because it was a Catholic household when the practices of the Roman Church were proscribed. This and the loyalty to the Royalists during the Civil War led to

the Ferrers needing to improve their liquidity by selling furniture to the Protestant Featherstons at Packwood who had backed the winning side! I was particularly struck by some of the fireplace surrounds, of which a massive stone one was originally on the first floor, only to be moved to the ground floor after the abandonment of the first floor "Great Hall" which eventually served as an artist's studio. I do regret the unwillingness of the Trust to allow photography, though I understand their reasoning. As bricks came into more general use as an architectural fashion, half-timbered walls were replaced with brickwork, as a way of impressing visitors. Perversely, a late Victorian extension, added to facilitate the accommodation of servants - yet another way of impressing your guests - has as its top storey half-timbered decoration done with the perfection that only the Victorians do - hence lacking the imperfections that to me give such buildings their mediaeval character. Perhaps I'm too much of a romantic!

The grounds lack the creativity of Packwood, the courtyard within the house being simply planted with variously coloured French Marigolds in diamond shaped beds reflecting the Ferrers Coat of Arms whereas the herbaceous borders in the walled garden lacked the flair and exuberance of those we enthused over at the former property. A final visit to the restaurant for our included tea and cakes completed an excellent day's outing.

John Oakley

The Autumn Lecture

THE NATIONAL FOREST - A Forest in the making

On 16th October, we were given a most enthusiastic and informative talk by Penny Wilkinson about the achievements of The National Forest Company which was set up as a non profit making organisation by the Government (Defra) in 1995 to develop the proposals of the National Forest Development Team. This had been set up in 1990 by the Countryside Commission to propose a Forest Strategy and prepare a Business Plan. The proposal was to create a new forest covering 200 sq. miles of countryside across Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, (including the towns of Burton upon Trent, Swadincote, Ashby de la Zouch, Coalville and Markfield), increasing the tree cover from an existing 6% to around 30 % and to provide in a sustainable manner:-

New recreation and tourism facilities

New landscapes

New uses for farmland

Economic regeneration (to replace mining)

A reduction in CO₂

This part of the Midlands area was selected in preference to Arden or Sherwood Forests etc. partly because of the need to mitigate the effects of pit closures, but largely because of the local public enthusiasm for the scheme.

The National Forest Company owns no land but persuades local land owners to plant trees by giving grants and advice; it encourages other bodies such as The Woodland Trust or Corporate sponsors to buy land and plant trees, (Jaguar have sponsored a Walnut wood). It aids private or public bodies to set up businesses or facilities to meet the other objective of economic regeneration. It is funded by a grant from Defra, (£3.35m for 2008), private, business and public donors and a "Plant a Tree" scheme (£25 per tree).

So far, 7 million trees have been planted, increasing the tree cover from 6 % to 16 %. There are now 400 woodlands (of which 86% have public access) and 700 miles of paths. The number of visitors has risen from 2 to 7 million and 4000 jobs have been created in tourism in addition to those in forestry and new businesses. A new 60-bed Youth hostel has been built (with an award for sustainability). Other achievements have been the development of walking and cycling trails (with disabled provision) and the establishment of the Conkers Discovery Centre at Rawdon Pit. The Forest area contains many tourist attractions including Calke Abbey, Staunton Harold, Melbourne Hall, a maize maze at Moira, the National Memorial Arboretum etc. More information is available on the website www.nationalforest.org.

In answer to questions, Penny told us that 86% of the planting is of native forest trees, 14% conifers (of which Larch is native), initially at high density to promote growth (but at 2.2m between rows to allow motor mowing) with thinning at around 15 years (longer for oak). A high proportion of oak is being planted, but no Elm. (There is a fine Elm still existing near Moira.) So far there has been no noticeable effect of climate change. It was pointed out that CO₂ emissions caused by people travelling to the area would offset, to some extent, the

benefits of the additional trees. A “walk pack” is produced but due to the rapid changes may not be up to date. Every year, the Ordnance Survey up-date their maps which show the paths.

Those of us who had not yet visited any of the attractions offered by the National Forrest, felt encouraged to do so.

Peter Rawson

Friends Evening Thursday, 20th November 2008

Four speakers and forty-eight members attended.

The evening began with Pippa Wheatcroft detailing her rationale for planning a new landscape for the ‘Old Rectory’ Furnace Rd. Warwick. (a grade 2 listed building), establishing the client brief and taking it in three phases:

- a) a place for sunny seating,
- b) the main approach to the building and.
- c) dealing with a particular feature - ‘the pineapple avenue’.

The work included the repositioning of the compost heap and setting a grass sward under the apple trees rather than a hard surface that bruised the falling fruit.

In order to raise the profile of the Trust website Sue Blaxland explained how to navigate the system. New members should find the home page particularly useful, www.lrgt.org . This allows you to click onto the exact items of interest whether it be visits, lectures, past reports, future events, newsletters, related organisations and historic postcards.

Across the top of the Home page the menu includes: About us, Research, Education, Newsletter, How to join us and Contact lrgt.(Leicestershire and Rutland Garden Trust).

Peter Rawson showed us some spectacular photographs of local sites as well as Versailles and Sardinia. He really has a very good creative eye for composition and pattern.

Stephen Barker showed what he called his holiday snaps but then he had been on some interesting holidays. To the North East, Alnwick, Wallington Hall, Helmsley to Duncombe House., Amsterdam - open gardens and green gardens and to Japan to Kyoto and the Golden Temple and very formulaic designs.

These are always entertaining evenings at this time of the year allowing us to be both informed and also summarising the past year.

Sue Porter

Launde Abbey

On Sunday 14th September a group of us went to Launde Abbey. We were lucky with the weather. It was a lovely day and very welcome after all the rain we had been having.



The afternoon began with a talk by Sue Blaxland, showing us and telling us about the beginnings of Launde, and its progress through the centuries. The Abbey was built in 1119 by a group of Augustinian monks [black friars] under the sponsorship of Sir Richard Bassett, Justiciar of England.

For over 300 years the monks lived peacefully and prosperously, training Priests, working the land,

and looking after the spiritual and physical welfare of the people in the countryside around Launde and of passing travellers.

In 1402 the then Prior was executed by Henry IV for treason, and the Bishop Of London, visiting the Priory at that time, reported that the monks were not keeping their vows as carefully as they should. From then on the numbers of monks slowly declined.

Henry VIII sent Thomas Cromwell in 1539 to assess what Launde had to offer. Cromwell liked what he found there, and having examined the land and the accounts, wrote in his note book 'For myself, Launde'. Cromwell bought the Abbey from Henry VIII for £15,000 in 1539, the last Prior retiring on a pension of £60 per annum. Much of the portable property had already been removed, some say by Cromwell himself, to nearby friends, to be recovered later! Before he could move into the Abbey, however, Cromwell was arrested, charged with High Treason, and executed in July 1540. He must have intended to live at Launde, because he took the title Baron Oakham, and sent his son Gregory from Lewes to Launde to live. Gregory was married to Elizabeth Seymour, sister of Jane, and although he was much impoverished by his father's disgrace, Henry was not vindictive towards him. Gregory died peacefully at Launde at 1551.

Rev Tim Blewett, Warden of Launde, gave us a short talk about the Religious history of the Abbey and took us outside to look at the Chapel which dates from the 12th century, and was a side chapel of the original Abbey church.

Between 1551 and 1910 there were numerous owners. The Abbey was altered to suit its various occupants' tastes. Most of the monks' outbuildings and the Church have gone. The stable block was built in 1760 and service rooms added at the back in 1829. New larger windows were put in the front of the main building but much of the original small stone house remains. The setting and the tranquility are timeless.



In 1957 the then owners of Launde, Cecil Rawlins Coleman and his wife Lilian, returned the Abbey to the Church, together with 450 acres of land and woods. It is now a Retreat House and Conference Centre, with accommodation for over 50 guests in the modernised stable block.



We had tea and cakes in the Abbey hall and then we went out into the gardens.

The gardens are spacious, but rather bare, mostly grass with some small flower beds. The ancient workings have been covered over and hidden, but they are not lost as many maps and records exist, including aerial photographs taken in the 1940s showing tennis courts, paths and formal planting areas.

The monks' stew ponds are still there, a ha-ha and some fine mature trees. Launde means an open space in a wood and the whole area was thickly wooded in medieval times. We walked round the large undated walled kitchen garden which is still used to grow flowers, fruit and veg for the house. The 'greens' were suffering somewhat from the dreaded caterpillars that are really very bad, this year. The extensive green houses are not in use at the moment, but are hopefully to be restored. They were used at some time to grow figs and peaches.

We very much enjoyed our day in the sunshine and wish everyone well with their future plans for Launde.

Jackie Allcott

Impressions of the Winter Lunch...from my sick-bed

I was unable to attend the winter lunch this year, but this is what I heard.

The food was wonderful - there were enormous Yorkshire puddings with almost everything - there was too much food, two courses would have been enough. Lovely food, good pub - the bread & butter pudding was to die for. The room got very hot - a Venetian blind was needed, (this has already been put to the management) the noise level of conversation was pretty high - there were new Friends - it was a really enjoyable occasion - no-one was able to complete Stephen's quiz and, finally, very assiduous Friends who got new Friends got Champagne - so that was alright, and we have arranged to go there next year.

Meanwhile back in Leicester this little piggy stayed at home and had Complian.

I have appreciated all your good wishes over the last three months, many, many thanks.

Elizabeth Bacon

Cambridge Botanic Garden and Anglesey Abbey

On February 14th, 2009 after a very wintry period, we set off on a cold but dry day to Cambridge Botanical Garden, arriving in very good time and to a welcome cup of coffee. The sun was out and remained with us for the rest of the day making everything look wonderful.



After coffee we were then met by our guides, 10 people to a group. Our guide was Pat Munn who had a very keen knowledge of every plant and tree including the *Prunus davidiana* 'alba' providing winter blossom. Also the very unusual snake bark maple '*Acer capillipes*', and '*Acer griseum*'.

Beneath the trees were densely planted Aconites and Snowdrops. In contrast were the striking leaves of *Bergenia* in tones of deep maroon and the dark purple *Prunus* 'kesselringii' along with *Berberis* 'darwinii'. Shrubs such as *Cornus* and *Salix* are pruned hard back to provide brilliantly coloured stems of red gold and orange.

All this is kept in order by 19 gardeners. On the way to the glasshouses we passed the interesting-looking fountain designed by David Mellor with seven large discs shaped like water lily leaves cast in bronze. Tight columns of water rise from each.



Our visit concluded with a visit to the Glasshouse range where we saw the Panama Hat Palm which grows six leaves on each stem. On the north wall we found various Epiphytes anchored onto nearby tree trunks and branches.

We were fascinated by the Jade Vine from the Philippines with its spectacular descending bunches of Jade coloured flowers and were told that this plant is pollinated by bats

Another fascinating plant was the Madagascan Periwinkle which was used in drugs to treat diabetes and childhood leukaemia.

It was the 'Kapok tree' that had us busy with our cameras. On leaving the garden we passed a very old Black Walnut tree and an Isaac Newton apple tree.



Jade Vine

This very interesting garden has 16 National Collections. It was fascinating to see so many varied and unusual plants in one place.



After enjoying our packed lunches on the coach we continued our journey to Anglesey Abbey.

At Anglesey Abbey we found a wonderful selection of over 200 varieties of Snowdrops spanning the garden. The proper name is Galanthus and being Greek means 'Milk Flower'. Through history one name for them is Candlemas Bells, as a result of them flowering at the time of Candlemas.

The religious link is likely to explain them being found on many religious or monastic sites and could account for their prolific blossoming at Anglesey Abbey, once home to a small community of Augustinian Monks.



Apart from the Snowdrops which were in peak condition, the Winter Walk is an amazing collection of colourful shrubs and trees. The Sacococca plants that lined the Winter Walk smelt delicious in the afternoon sun. The colourful stems of the orange, red and golden Cornus, mingled with Hamamelis, looked wonderful and at the end of the Winter Walk, the collection of Silver Birches was an unforgettable sight. The various purple shades of Hellebores amid the Snowdrops added to the colourful scene.

We really enjoyed our day in Cambridge. We are newcomers to this pleasant group and we would like to thank Elizabeth for her knowledge and hard work for planning the outings and hope to continue in joining you on other events.

Pam Ward of Newbold Verdon Garden Club



Spring Lecture – 12th March 2009

Indian Influences on English Gardens



Clapham Common bandstand

What do Clapham Common bandstand, Brighton Pavilion and Himalayan Balsam have in common? They all result from Indian influences on English gardens. This was the subject of Kate Harwood's lecture which followed this year's AGM. Kate told 55 members and guests (a splendid attendance, particularly for the AGM!) that our fascination with all things Indian started in earnest in the 18th century. Employees of the East India Company sent home letters and journals describing Indian culture, splendid tombs made of marble and glorious Mughal gardens. Thomas and William Daniells created quite a stir when they exhibited their Indian paintings at the Royal Academy. Such was the

allure of India that painters who had never even been there produced "Indian paintings". Eventually, the Indian style started to appear in house and garden design as the old India hands returned to England with their fortunes and built country mansions. Although they were considered a little vulgar and nouveaux by the upper classes, it didn't stop them producing some interesting and stylish buildings. Examples are many and varied: Lenton Gate House, Nottingham; the Temple at Preston Pathead, Lothian; Western Pavilion Brighton to name but a few. A particularly fine example of the Indian influence is Sezincote, the Cotswold mansion built by Charles Cockerill, a merchant and ex post master general of Bengal. The LGRT will be visiting Sezincote on Wednesday 1st July; this visit is linked to this lecture. Book your tickets early, if Kate's pictures and vivid narrative are anything to go by, we're in for a real treat at Sezincote.



Sezincote

Diane Horsfield (photographs c. Kate Harwood)

Exhibition – 'Garden and Cosmos'

The **British Museum** will be mounting an exhibition called 'Garden and Cosmos' The Royal Paintings of Jodhpur. It will run from 28/05/09 to 23/08/09, Admission £8 and concessions.

The exhibition consists of 56 paintings from India which have not been previously displayed in Europe. They illustrate the artistic tradition that flourished in the Royal Courts of Jodhpur from the 17th to 19th Centuries. To coincide with the exhibition the British Museum in partnership with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew will be creating an Indian landscape in the forecourt of the museum. This will contain a range of plants to demonstrate the rich variety of

India's regions from desert plains to tropical jungle to mountain habitats. For further details see the British Museum website.

Research Group

The Research Group has had an enjoyable, successful and productive few months. We've continued to enter research data on to the Parks and Gardens UK database (www.parksandgardens.ac.uk), recent entries include Launde Abbey, Brooksby (see article below) and Braunstone Park and our on going projects include Castle gardens, Evington Arboretum and Staunton Harold. Although the heritage Lottery funding for the database has come to an end, we will still be able to add future research to the website. We've also had a productive meeting with members of the Leicester City Council Parks and Green Spaces team and are delighted to be able to share resources with them.

Other activities planned for this year include guided visits to Castle Gardens and Belgrave Hall and a workshop at the Record Office in Wigston. This workshop may be of interest to Friends involved in other types of research, eg family history. If you would like to take part contact Deborah for details.

We have welcomed several new members to the group and would be very pleased if anybody else would like to join us – no particular expertise is required and it's certainly not all hard work.

Deborah Martin

A GARDEN DETECTIVE STORY



There was a stone pergola, which, according to Pevsner, was attributed to Lutyens, though nobody seemed to know where this information came from. There were some fine urns and beautiful York stone paving, a piece of stone balustrade in a rather Italianate style plonked down (there's no better word for it) incongruously at one end of the concrete terrace of a 1960's house on the campus, and an intriguing round house with a thatched roof, looking somewhat like an African hut.

I've known the gardens at Brooksby College for many years, first as a horticulture student and then as a part-time tutor. Despite the various institutional buildings which have been added over the years, and the constraints caused by lack of money, I always felt that the place had a lovely atmosphere and that there was more to the gardens than immediately met the eye.



So when the Research Group was deciding on its next project, Brooksby Hall seemed an obvious choice. I knew that there were plans afoot for a new building, and it was important to find out more about the garden history before work started. Access would be easy, there was a history of the estate in the Library to start us off and, of course, I had got some contacts with members of staff, past and present, whom we could talk to. Oh, and we had another clue: in our postcard collection was an image of the Hall with the stone pergola, clearly



The postcard of the pergola



The view of the pergola today

newly constructed, viewed across the Lake. The card, which was franked 7th August 1915, was entitled “Brooksby Hall, Leicestershire Residence of Rear Admiral Sir David Beatty, C.B., M.V.O., D.S.O.” We knew about the Beatty connection, and this meant that the pergola had to pre-date August 1915.

We started to build a timeline of Brooksby’s evolution from a Viking settlement, then as a medieval village (abandoned because of the Black Death and enclosures) to its ownership by the powerful Villiers family till the early 18th century. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Hall, which was a small Jacobean manor house, had various owners and was also leased out as a Hunting Box. The Earl of Cardigan of “Charge of the Light Brigade” fame was one of the illustrious tenants. However, it was not really until the latter part of the 19th century that money was lavished on the property with a major extension to the Hall. The owner was a keen agriculturalist and horticulturalist. According to estate agent’s details, there were fine specimen trees, terraced walks and ornamental flower beds. He ordered plants from local nurseries, as well as the renowned nurserymen, Veitches of Chelsea.

The heyday of the gardens was during the Beatty era: broadly, the first three decades of the 20th century. The garden was extended westwards into the park, a lake and stream were constructed and formal gardens were created around the Hall. During the Second World War, the Hall became a Red Cross convalescent home for servicemen and then, immediately after the War, a Farm Institute and Agricultural College.

We were also delighted to find a collection of old photographs in Brooksby Library, though



they all seemed to be post-war. Our first major discovery was that there had been a fine walled garden, which disappeared in the 1970’s, to be replaced by a modern teaching block. I taught there for ten years, and had no idea!

Our next step was a visit to the Leicester Record Office, which proved very fruitful. Ordinance Survey maps are always a useful source of information and

the 1903 map showed that there had been a bridleway from the main Melton Road down to the Church. It showed us the shape of the walled garden as well. We were thrilled to discover an earlier title map of 1848, which showed that it already existed back then. This predated the information in the *Brooksby History*.

Our real ‘finds’ were more sale particulars from 1935 and a survey made at the time of the purchase by the County Council in 1945. The latter went into considerable detail about both the Hall and the Grounds. It wasn’t it estate agent’s hyperbole either, but told it like it was – potholes, peeling paintwork and all. We solved the Italianate balustrade mystery; there had been an Italian-style water garden with balustrades (not Dutch, as mentioned in the *Brooksby History*). We found out what was growing in the walled garden as well.

We also discovered that Beatty had commissioned greenhouses from Thos. Messengers of Loughborough (the Amdega of their day). There was an amusing exchange of correspondence about the bill as well. There were the plans for a new gardener’s cottage. We found bills for gilding the stableyard clock, pointing walls in the walled garden and lots more besides.

Sadly we didn’t find an invoice from Mr. E.L. Lutyens for building the pergola, so I’m afraid that this was probably wishful thinking.

And the African hut? We didn’t find out when it was built, but it was there in 1955 and was used by an early Principal of the College as a garden shed!



What else did our research show us? Just because it says so in print, it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s true and you need to try to go back to original documents. Also, you need to treat oral history with caution. Finding out about the history of a garden in this way adds a whole new dimension to your experience when you visit. If you feel that this kind of digging around in the past would interest you, we would be delighted to welcome you to the Research Group.

Our findings are now on the Parks and Gardens database: www.parksandgardens.ac.uk and also there is a copy of our report on the Trust’s own website: www.lrgt.org

So if you want to find out more about the garden, this information is now available.

Sue Blaxland

Postcard Collection

Members of the Trust who have logged onto the Trust’s website will have had the opportunity to view postcards from the Trust’s collection, which are currently being scanned and entered into a database. The Trust’s collection of postcards is approximately 350 in number, which has been augmented by cards loaned from a private collection, taking the number of images of parks and gardens in Leicestershire and Rutland to nearly 400.

Picture postcards have, for some time, been recognised as a useful source of information by social historians, giving insights into various aspects of life in the past. It is only fairly recently that their use for garden history has been recognised, with a number of significant collections being deposited in national archives ⁽¹⁾. For the Trust, they provide a relatively

inexpensive way of obtaining photographs of how existing parks and gardens looked at the end of the Nineteenth Century and in the early Twentieth Century.

Postcards in the collection provide us information that is not readily available elsewhere; this is particularly true of public parks. The cards in the collection show details in the park - many of which no longer exist, such as the Japanese Garden in Abbey Park. We can also see changes over time, such as details of the bedding schemes in beds around the former Pavilion



in Abbey Park, including the planting for the Coronation of George V in 1911. The use the parks were put to is also reflected with pictures of sporting activities, including bowls, tennis and boating as well as views of people relaxing and children playing. As cards were produced on a commercial basis, the number of views produced of different parks gives an indication of their relative popularity and importance to the general public.

In some respects, some of the most interesting cards are those that were produced showing the smaller estates and the gardens attached to private houses. Many of these cards were produced by local photographers and stationers, in many cases for the owners of the house that was being photographed. These are gardens that would not normally be recorded in the contemporary publications. They provide a useful snapshot of what private individuals were actually doing in their gardens, as opposed to the advice of professional writers. An example of this is a card of house in Hinckley which was sent as a Christmas card: it shows the husband and wife standing in their back garden showing a small greenhouse/conservatory attached to the rear of the house.

The postcard collection has proved useful to the Research and Recording Group in preparing entries for the Parks and Gardens Database and to illustrate existing entries for the two counties. It has also been accessed by outside researchers: for the Parks and Gardens Database we were able to supply images of children playing in public parks for an



Old postcard view showing Castle Gardens

educational project that they were creating for schools. The Trust has also had links with Leicester City Council over public parks where information and pictures have been exchanged. We have been able to assist the Council with images of the Castle Gardens.

There is further work to be done on researching the cards in the collection, which will provide a useful resource for now and in the

future. The Trust is still looking to add cards to its collection and would be interested to hear from anyone who has postcards of the two counties.

Stephen Barker

Notes.

⁽¹⁾ Two collections of postcards of municipal parks, both consisting of approximately 5,000 cards have been donated to national collections. In 2001 the collection of Nigel Temple was donated to the National Monuments Record Centre Swindon and that of Brent Elliott was donated to the Royal Horticultural Society's Lindley Library.

Bibliography

A Brief Guide to the use of Picture Postcards in Garden History. Brent Elliott. Garden History, The Journal of the Garden History Society. Vol. 31 No. 2. Winter 2003.

Discovering Picture Postcards. C W Hill. Shire Publications. Tring. Herts. 1970

Picture Postcards. C W Hill. Shire Album 208. Shire Publications Ltd. Princes Risborough, Aylesbury. Buck. First published 1987, reprinted 1991.

Duelling Gardeners: Dudley, Cecil and Queen Elizabeth I

Elizabeth I was passionate about gardens and two key figures in her Court vied for her attention by creating rival gardens for her to visit.

Trea Martin's book 'Elizabeth and the Garden' explores this relationship and we attended her fascinating lecture on the subject, at the AGT.

These gardens provided a stage set and a back drop for courtly life, with walks, aviaries, fountains and sweet-smelling flowers.

At their houses, Theobalds and Kenilworth, William Cecil and Robert Dudley strove to outdo each other in the grandeur and extravagance of their garden designs. This opened the way for a whole new outlook, overlaying Italian Renaissance style on to Tudor symbolism.

The recreation of the Elizabethan garden at Kenilworth by English Heritage is truly stunning. Any serious student of garden history cannot afford to miss our trip there in August.

Elizabeth Bacon, Sue Blaxland, Deb Martin

English Heritage—a new BBC2 series

A 4 part series on the work of English Heritage starts on BBC 2 at 9.30pm on 24th April. The garden at **Kenilworth** will be featured

Nick Bennett

Long standing members of LRGT will remember Nick Bennett our former Chairman, who has more recently been Chairman of the AGT. Early in the year Nick announced his retirement from this post, as from March, for health reasons. We send him our best wishes

and thanks for his contribution to the AGT. Sally Walker of Sussex Gardens Trust has taken over as Acting Chairman

Obituary Marie Bray.

Marie, who had been a friend of mine for many years died in The Loros Hospice on August 24th 2008. She was born in the Welsh valleys, at the age of eighteen she left home to start teacher training at Stoke Rochford. It was at a dance there that she met her husband Derek. On completing her training she moved to Leicester where she lived and worked for the rest of her life. After the death of Derek she became a Friend of the Trust and when her health permitted she came to several events, she was due to join us in Paris but further complications set in a couple of weeks or so before we were due to leave and she had to cancel at the last minute. I think that was very sad, it would have been her first trip abroad. Marie was very proud of her Welsh heritage and never lost her accent, I do miss her.

Elizabeth Bacon

AGT News and Events

Publications

Devon Gardens Trust has recently produced a new publication *A Short history, 1988-2008* (24pp, A5 size, £3.50 inc p&p) to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Trust. This is available directly from the Trust (devon-gardens@btconnect.com)

Events

London Parks and Gardens Trust

The weekend of **June 13 & 14, 2009** will see the 11th **Open Garden Squares Weekend in London**. Visitors will have a rare opportunity to peer behind the walls of more than 190 of London's private community gardens and squares ranging from historically important ones to traditional allotments through to contemporary and eco-friendly gardens.

One ticket allows entry to all venues over entire Weekend. Ticket prices will be £6.75 (including free postage) in advance and £8 if bought during the weekend.

Full details about all the participating gardens and squares are included in the guide that is given free with tickets. Information can also be found at www.opensquares.org along with the latest on special events and opening times.

AGT Annual Weekend Conference and AGM, 4th-5th September 2009

Lincolnshire Gardens Trust will be hosting the 2009 conference at Lincoln Hotel. Speakers include David Robinson on Joseph Banks in Lincolnshire, Beryl Lott and John Harris. Visits to Doddington Hall, Harlaxton Manor, Aubourn Hall, Easton Walled Garden and Harrington Hall. Programme and booking details on www.gardenstrusts.org.uk

October 16: Walled Kitchen Garden Network International Forum at Hampton Court, Surrey. Speakers include Antoine Jacobsohn from the Potager du Roi at Versailles and Dr Kristin Puttmann from the Stiftung Schloss Eutin, Germany. Todd Longstaffe-Gowan, gardens adviser for Hampton Court Palace will explain the plans for the palace's kitchen

garden and Herman van den Bossche will speak on the museum garden at Gaasbeek Castle in Belgium. Details from Fiona Grant on f.grant14@tiscali.co.uk

LRGT Forthcoming Events

Thursday 7th May Celebrity Lecture
Why Garden? Speaker Anna Pavord

Thursday 14th May Visit to Broughton Grange Estate, Oxfordshire

Wednesday 3rd June 5 day holiday to Wiltshire

Details of the above events have already been circulated to Friends

Wednesday 24th June Evening visit to Goadby Hall Gardens, Goadby Marwood

Wednesday 1st July Coach trip to Sezincote and Batsford Arboretum. Glos.

Sunday 26th July Guided walking tour of Uppingham with a Blue Badge Guide
followed by tea at South Luffenham Hall

Sunday 2nd August Coffee Morning

Thursday 20th August Whole day visit to the restored Elizabethan Garden at
Kenilworth and restored Victorian Allotments at Hill Close,
Warwick

The next flyer for Goadby Marwood and Sezincote will be sent out shortly.

Useful Contact Numbers

Chairman	Stephen Barker	01858 433545
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Events	Elizabeth Bacon	0116 2705711
Research and Recording	Deborah Martin	0116 2707525

Or you can contact us at www.lrgt.org