LRGT

Travel Edition

Herefordshire Gardens

4th-7th June 2013

TIME FOR ONE LAST PHOTOGRAPH AT WHITLEY COURT

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HEREFORDSHIRE HOLIDAY - 2013

A couple of weeks before we were due to leave for Herefordshire, the coach company with whom we were booked decided, at 36 hours notice, not to take us to Rousham. The reasons were spurious to say the least, and, not only that, but it seemed that there was some doubt as to whether they would take us on holiday. I was relieved that it was the responsibility of Travel Editions to sort it out, which they did with help, I believe, from John Hales our coach driver.

Not the best of starts for our ninth garden trust holiday, and then on the morning of departure there was an accident on London Road which meant we were late in leaving. This was just about a first for Trust events as The Friends are good time keepers and it is rare not to leave on the dot.

That is how the holiday continued: we were late for virtually every visit and it took me a little while to work out why this should be; it had never happened before, and then the penny dropped. The fault lay with Route Finder, which can tell you the distance and approximate times between places but cannot tell you about the type of roads and whether the route can accommodate large coaches which a lot of Herefordshire lanes cannot. This was a salutary lesson for me and Travel Editions. At one point Kilpeck church was something like six miles away, but the road could not take the coach so the six miles turned into a round trip of fifty minutes and we had to miss out on the visit to Symonds Yat.

However, the holiday turned out to be one of our best. It's difficult to say exactly why, and we even had cloudy days whilst the rest of the country was bathed in sunshine. It was obviously a combination of reasons; the hotel was almost perfect - good food, helpful staff, very comfortable and privately owned. The gardens were all of contrasting styles from the 17th century Dutch water garden at Westbury Court to the theatricality of Roy Strong's garden and the sombre burn-out shell of Witley Court on the hill overlooking the estate. We saw a twenty-first century Capability Brown landscape at Brockhampton, where the owner had used a digger to move tons of earth to alter the contours of the land to achieve a desired view. The biggest surprise was Stockton Bury, a garden unknown to me but a fantastic combination of design, colour, choice of plants and planting. I don't know why it's not better known. We also enjoyed or endured rather eccentric catering arrangements here. At Monnington Court, I hardly saw the garden as we were shown round the house first and this was amazing. It was a medieval house which the owners had furnished in a medieval style, was full of treasures, prints and paintings and was very cold. What is more, the guide just let us wander everywhere, even the bathrooms. The beds of course were all four poster - quite fascinating.

We managed to visit two churches, both of which were architectural gems. Brockhampton, a thatched Arts and Crafts church, described by Pevsner as" one of the most convincing and impressive churches of its time in any country". This was not on our trip but thankfully Rowan and Peter Clay at Brockhampton persuaded us that it should not be missed. I am so pleased we took their advice: I was captivated by it. In contrast Kilpeck is widely regarded as England's most perfect Norman church, where we arrived some hour or so late and found our excellent guide waiting for us.

Which brings me to the people we met - owners and guides who were most welcoming and helpful: James at Kilpeck , the garden guide at Hereford Cathedral whose name I never knew, the English Heritage guide at

Witley, where we appeared to hijack her tour, and the owners of Stockton Bury who did not seem to mind me asking who was the head gardener, and all the others who helped to make this one of our best trips.

Our thanks are due to Anne Longdon of Herefordshire Garden Trust who gave excellent advice with regard to possible garden visits and John Hales our coach driver who helped sort the early problems with the coach company and was, as ever, his helpful self throughout the trip. This was probably his last with us as he had retired the previous week. We gave him his retirement presentation in front of the great fountain at Witley Court, thus disrupting the English Heritage tour and giving us an opportunity to wish him well and truly thank him for all his efforts on our behalf. Finally my thanks are to Jo Blair of Travel Editions without whom none of our trips would have been possible. She is a pleasure to work with and, perhaps, if it had not been for her, I would not have carried on co-ordinating the holidays. She has now left Travel Editions but we may well have not seen the last of her.

Elizabeth Bacon

WESTBURY COURT

Westbury Court was the first garden to be visited on the 2013 LRGT holiday, our visit to the garden was blessed with fine weather and our tour of the garden was conducted by the head gardener.

Lying on flat land within the loop of the River Severn, Westbury Court is considered to be the finest example of a Dutch Style water garden in the Country. The garden was taken over by the National Trust in 1967 and was the first complete garden restoration that the Trust had undertaken. The garden has been restored to how it would have looked in the 1720s, subject to the loss of part of the garden on the west side. A key source of information for the appearance of the garden is a Kip engraving published in 1708. We were told that the engraving probably shows what was intended for the garden and not what was actually in existence at the date of publication.

The garden, which has survived changes in garden style over 300 years, was created in two stages, the first in the late 1690's and the next stage from 1715. The Dutch style became fashionable in England following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the arrival of William III from Holland onto the English throne. The main features of the garden are two canals with a two storey pavilion in the Dutch style aligned on one of the canals. The canals are flanked by clipped Yew hedges which are surmounted by topiary balls and cones of clipped holly. The gardener discussed the problems they are facing with the yews, which have suffered from repeated flooding of the site and the impact of disease. The Trust is experimenting with alternatives to Yew for the hedges. All the plants in the water garden are varieties from before 1700.

One of the features of the garden is a Holm Oak which predates the garden and is reputed to be over 400 years old. It is thought to have been a boundary between Westbury Court and neighbouring Sayes Court. Other specimen trees include a Tulip Tree which is one of the tallest in the country and is 150-200 years old. Other trees include a Medlar and a Service Tree. The picnic area contains old Perry trees and is the site of a former Hop yard. There are also examples of old fruit trees.

The Parterre which originally stood on the west side of the garden has been recreated on a reduced scale to the east of the canals. The earth within the hedged line beds is mounded up in a style known as Carp back. In Holland this was done to assist drainage but in England it became a style feature. Within the beds the plants are well spaced surrounded by bare earth so that each plant can be viewed individually as was the fashion in the early eighteenth century.

In the north-east corner of the garden is a small walled garden dating from 1715. No details of the original garden, which is on the site of a former service area for preparing meat for the kitchen, exist. The design is based on a garden at Charlcote and the plants within this area are varieties dating from before 1740.Within a corner of the walled garden is small square garden room dating from 1715-23. The room is approached by a low flight of steps and enjoys views over the garden.

The garden was in an excellent state of maintenance despite being flooded in the spring following the heavy rainfall. Our guide was very informative about the history of the garden and the plants and about the problems of the garden and the Trust's plans for the future.

Stephen Barker

THE LASKETT GARDENS

Had the creators of Laskett Gardens been just Unknown Names, say a Mr and Mrs Smith, would we have regarded these lovely gardens differently? But knowing they were created over the last 40 years by a highly regarded stage-designer, Julia Trevelyan Oman and her husband, Roy Strong, a one-time Director of the V & A and a renowned authority of Elizabethan portraiture, would we not, almost inevitably, look at the gardens as the obvious product of the worlds of the Theatre and of Historical Art?

Laskett Gardens (the plural seems appropriate) are a series of "garden rooms" opening out from one to another, linked with avenues, serpentine paths and walks, mostly with some statue, fountain, urn or obelisk as a central feature. It is all rather formal, the hand of man dominates. Nature, wild or over-abundant Nature, never quite takes over. One steps from some yew-enclosed square with careful topiary,

to a long walk of neat trimmed box trees with a statue or a colonnade at the end. Almost every enclosed garden could be a stage set. A rose arbour could conceal Sir Toby Belch and Andrew Aguecheek while Malvolio ambles down a wide grass walk, the same arbour could conceal Benedict while he overhears the plotters discussing his love for Beatrice, till she herself arrives to summon him to dinner. All this is so suitable for comedies, historical-pastorals and all the others that Polonius lists, and though The Colonnade Court would be excellent for murdering Julius Caesar in, with the dark bushes behind for the conspirators to lurk, none of this would be suitable for the tragedies of Lear or Macbeth.

But how delightful it all is as we wander on. The feeling is light-hearted, witty, personal, worlds away from the formulas and theories, Kent and Capability Brown.

This is a strange season, summer has been delayed by a late spring (which barely existed) and now, in early June, there is little sign of Matthew Arnold's "high mid-summer pomps", no carnations, no gold-dusted snapdragons, but irises in plenty, great baroque splendours most delicately veined or taut precise ones in great clumps, huge poppies spilling out salmon-pink frills and cornflowers, sky-blue circles of anthers, columbines white and all possible pinks and lilacs and mauves – and in one garden round a pond, a hedge of crimson berberis with a profusion of dark purple columbines growing through it. Roses were just beginning and in great variety and, beautiful as it was, in this strange season, the exuberant beauty of high summer was not for us. But as compensation perhaps, these were unusual combinations of the delayed spring, in, for example, orchards, (and not all areas were so formal) where the apple blossom was still on the trees which stood knee-deep in grass with cow-parsley, daisies and buttercups. Is this year especially abundant in buttercups?

One remembers gardens as one has seen them. It is easy to forget that, in other seasons, they are so different. The bare tree which now shades this corner with its thick canopy, will let in winter light and a feeling of space; that deep upholstered flower border will be flat, compost-rich earth, that stone basin, standing in a circular pool now overflowing with geraniums and lobelia, will stand bare surrounded by ice.

This garden is about 40 years old. When the Strongs came, it was just a triangle of open field, not quite tree-less. A big cedar near the entrance was surely mature already and many cherry trees looked older than 40. It was made gradually, one small area designed, planted and tended, followed by another in the adjacent area.

How happy for the Strongs, all those years ago, when, as one exquisite "garden room" was invented and planted, there was always more land to be the site of another, to make brimful with more and yet more designs and plants by their teeming imaginations, their acute sense of scale and of colour.

The drawn map, of which we were each given a copy, is a model of legibility, accuracy and charm, which all gardeners who open their gardens to the public should emulate.

Ann Baer

HERGEST CROFT GARDENS

The gardens at Hergest Croft have been created over a period of over 100 years by several generations of the Banks family. Richard Banks, a geologist, planted some of the earliest exotic trees when he moved to the site in 1857. His son, William Banks, was, among other things, a passionate plant collector and, with his wife, laid out the garden and park wood. No designer was used, but they followed the writings of William Robinson. This was in the early part of the 20th century when plant collecting was at its height, one of the most renowned collectors being Ernest Wilson: many of his earliest collections were planted here.

After his death in 1930, his widow, and then the head gardener, took over the running of the garden until their son Richard took over in 1953. He was an industrialist but continued to add a huge number of trees and shrubs which form the basis of the collection today. His interest was in maples and birches. This is reflected in the range of these genera in the garden today and from the National Collections.

Lawrence Banks and his wife Elizabeth have had full responsibility for the gardens from 1988. He was a treasurer of the RHS and she is a noted landscape architect. Their son Edward now owns the garden and the planting continues.

There are now over 5,000 large, beautiful and rare trees growing in the garden, which is divided into several areas, including the azalea garden, maple grove, the kitchen garden and orchard. Our guided tour concentrated on the first two areas. It was led by Rowan, whom I thought at first was the head gardener such was his interest and knowledge. He was in fact an enthusiastic volunteer with no formal arboreal education and who did not wish to have any as the whole of the natural world was of considerable interest and he was intellectually satisfied with this. His enthusiasm was enormous.

His current interest was taxonomy. Every tree at Hergest is and has been carefully classified as to provenance, date of planting etc., creating an important record of the garden for the future. The trees were fantastic, particularly at this time of year with their new spring foliage. I was taken by the variety of birches with their barks of many colours. The tulip trees were the largest I had ever seen - in fact most of the trees were the largest I had ever seen. There was a magnificent purple sycamore and the acers were spectacular, especially the beetroot acer. There were

sweet and horse chestnuts, gingkoes, walnuts and lots more. We were just a bit late for the azaleas but there were just enough in flower to get their scent.

I did not get much further than this bit of the garden but others who went to the kitchen garden were impressed by the glasses and crops and the orchard. It is a most impressive place and I would dearly like to go again with the knowledge I have now of what to look for. We were running late and had to get to Stockton Bury for what turned out to be a rather eccentric lunch.

Elizabeth Bacon

STOCKTON BURY GARDENS

Stockton Bury Gardens extend to 4 acres set in the Herefordshire countryside, the gardens are billed as 'A place of timeless beauty', they are beautifully designed with one garden leading into another all with exceptional planting with many unusual shrubs, clematis, climbers and herbaceous plants which thrive on heavy clay soil.

Stockton Bury is part of a traditional mixed farm set amongst medieval farm buildings. Sheep are reared on the farm and all the farmyard manure is returned to the land.

This is a true plantsman's garden which is beautifully cared for, many of the gardens are surrounded by brick and stone walls and yew hedges, wooden seats are to be found throughout the gardens enabling visitors to sit and admire this exceptional garden. The most impressive garden was the dingle, formerly an old gravel quarry, the spring water flows gently through the garden into a series of pools and is surrounded by abundant lush planting of moisture loving plants.

The 11 gardens, iris walk and bluebell walk together with a pigeon house, grotto, greenhouse, bell loft and tithe barn provide a feast for the eyes, there is so much to see and admire, another lengthy visit is required to fully appreciate this very special garden.

Sarah Bailey

PERRYCROFT, designed by CFA Voysey in 1893

One of the many delights of our group summer study trips are the conversations following our return from the day's visits. Over a glass of wine (or bottle), diverse attitudes emerge over the merits, or otherwise, of the gardens or their associated houses.

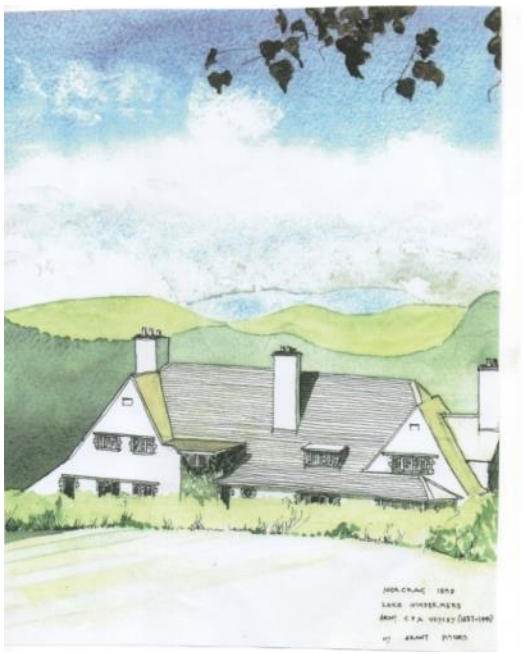
Perrycroft was no exception. An early house by Voysey was an opportunity for him to express his passion for 'Horizontalism' and his low ceiling interiors. Further, his use of projecting buttresses is developed, endemic with his approach to economic building. In the south facing garden elevation, he fully succeeds in taking the maximum value of the sunlight and superb views of the distant Malvern Hills. Controversy erupts, however, over the relationship of the house to the strong sloping site. 'Voysey made no attempt to tuck the house into the hillside, or to blend it into the landscape in true Arts & Crafts tradition'. *Wendy Hitchmough: CFA Voysey p69.* It appears perched on its levelled terrace, independent of its landscape context.

Gillian Archer, the owner, conducted us round. There has been serious investment in developing a series of walled gardens, imaginative yew hedges, including a delightful 'echo' of the buttresses forms, wild flower meadows, and a potential bog garden. The Head Gardener pointed out significant problems in upgrading this area.

On a practical level, walking down the sloping gravel paths proved uncomfortable and difficult. Sue made a very useful professional comment: Why not develop a series of steps using high quality stonework?

There were several negative comments about the over-formality of the landscape design being out of keeping with the character of the house. However, one member made a strong case for the delights of walking in a 'gentle loop' from the lower bog garden back through the formal one to the house terrace.

My summary is that Voysey was only beginning to really develop his area of architectural vocabulary. Further, his later two iconic houses overlooking Lake Windermere, Moorcrag (1898) and Broad Leys (1898), are classic examples of a superb integration of houses related to landscape, as illustrated in the sketch of Moorcrag with its low dominant roof. 'Moorcrag' is embedded in the hillside – the lines and local green slate of its roof, window dressings and terraces fix it with the landscape'. *Wendy Hitchmough.*



Perrycroft was just one of many exciting and sometimes emotional visits. We ran out of 'wows' early on!

Grant Pitches

BROCKHAMPTON COTTAGE

Despite the cloudy greyness of early morning, we realised instantly on arrival that this visit was all about landscape**.** The house, hardly a cottage, was set back on a large site, well up the side of a lovely Herefordshire valley. We approached along the contour line with a wide view on our left and the house ahead of us on the right. The two fitted together perfectly.

We were met by our host, Peter Clay who had fallen in love with the view from the house when, as a five year old he had been looking from his bedroom window in his grandfather's house. He inherited the house and all its land 13 years ago. The memory of his infant view remained waiting to be restored to its former glory. This desire was the driving force behind the creation of this magnificent natural looking scene.

This garden, begun in 1999 was also a product of friendship. Over a curry Peter Clay discussed with his friend, Mark Fane, the problem and so a plan began to be formed. There was now a landowner, a garden designer who had contributed garden designs at Chelsea Flower Show and a wife, Ravida Clay, with an amazing sense of colour. 200 So many plants would be needed, they might

as well produce a nursery and so a new landscaping and nursery business was formed and called Crocus. Others would need high quality products and they would be their market. Tom Stuart Smith provided a long list of desirable plants. Another friend was to play the final essential part. When the garden was completed and its owner peered at his long remembered view. He was shocked to see that the lake and the valley floor were still not visible. Fortunately Tom knew someone with access to motorway vehicles that were the right sort of movers and shakers. The hill side was converted from convex to concave in a very short time. The view emerged.

The first task had been to remove conifers hedges, including high thuja ones round the house, and open up the garden to the become part of the valley again. The natural look of a billowing more romantic landscape with clumps of coverts scattered throughout brought the garden landscape to life again. A wildflower meadow alongside the stream flowing into a lake, and arboretum and a perry pear orchard added to the enchantment.

Close to the house is a large stone paved terrace. A wide herbaceous border runs alongside a supporting wall which satisfies the soul. Purple, blue and dark pink are the dominating shades. Hellebores, delphiniums, white willow herb, salvias, verbascums and clumps of splurge paint the picture. Behind the house is an area for relaxing and entertaining friends where we enjoyed elderflower cordial and home-made biscuits while admiring the covering vine, pots of lilies. clinging clematis and roses. The Mediterranean sunshine needed to complete the picture eluded us but I was a happy and contented person in this nourishing setting.

Irene Jones

ALL SAINTS CHURCH, BROCKHAMPTON, 1901-2, WR Lethaby

It was an unexpected treat to be able to briefly visit what Nikolaus Pevsner has called 'the most thrilling church in any country' at the time.

WR Lethaby (1857-1931) was admired in both Britain and the continent as an important arts and crafts theorist, historian, architect and educationalist. He also happens to have several Leicester connections: he worked in Leicester with TH Baker for three months in 1879 and unsuccessfully entered a competition for the Evangelical Free Church on St Peters Road. Lethaby wrote a book on our own Ernest Gimson and was involved with Kenton, a furniture company set up with Gimson. Finally, the bells for All Saints, Brockhampton, were cast by Taylors of Loughborough.

For ten years, 1879-1889, Lethaby was chief assistant to Richard Norman Shaw and All Saints shows the influence of the long, low lines and central tower of the best of Richard Norman Shaw's churches such as All Saints, Leek, 1884-7, where Lethaby had also designed the reredos, pulpit and font.

As an arts and crafts architect, Lethaby believed one should creatively rework past principles rather than copy past forms. He wrote about the universal symbolic dimension of architecture and argued that 'Every building, even a cowshed, carries some sort of expression, and embodies some essential appeal to the imagination.' In All Saints, Brockhampton Lethaby obtains 'feeling' not with grandiose effects or ornament but largely through simplicity, association and contrasts of light, geometry, proportions and the texture of quality materials.

One's first impression is of a welcoming rustic building of coursed rubble stone. The nave and chancel are single storey with square headed windows and sheltering thatched roofs that read as 'domestic'; whilst the boarded bell tower with pyramidal shingle roof has an almost agricultural flavour. But then we notice the novel lattice tracery, the buttresses, the squat square crossing tower and gothic stone porch which say 'church'. Whilst the door hinges consist of two long abstract twisted rods of iron, above the door arch there are six stones each carved with flying doves of peace and a seventh with a cross with stars.

The nave interior takes one's breath in its primal simplicity. A low cave composed of a rhythmic series of transverse pointed arches. Built of pink sandstone, the arches emerge from the plinth like primitive crucks, lacking bases, capitals or mouldings. They support mass concrete vaults onto which the exterior roof thatch has been laid; their white painted undersides still show the timber shuttering marks from construction. Along the side walls, between the arches, horizontal deep set windows with paired cylindrical mullions in the reveals provide a half light.

Given the gloom the eye is naturally drawn to the distant, diminutive jewel-like sanctuary; the repetitive solid oak pews and stone floor slabs

are hardly noticed. Magically a shaft of light, from windows hidden in the crossing tower, transforms the chancel arch into a brilliant white halo framing the chancel. Bright tapestries with Burne-Jones angels flank the altar, above which triple lancets and a star shaped window by Christopher Whall sparkle with seven colourful saints and two angels. By contrast the low key, oak choir stalls attract one's attention by chance when the light accidentally catches the forty delicate, shallow relief wild flower carvings by George Jack.

All is quintessentially arts and crafts. As is the fact that Lethaby worked collaboratively alongside his chosen builders and craftsmen. Interestingly when problems arose, as is often the case in complex architectural projects, instead of passing on escalating costs Lethaby, a socialist, took full responsibility when a crack occurred and even refused his fee. Maybe a lesson for today's bankers!!!!

Rowan Roenisch

MONNINGTON COURT

I'd looked forward to this visit for the sculpture, but, it was soon apparent, there was so much more in store. In fact, I think some people never got to do the garden.

The present owners, Angela Connor, sculptor, and John Bulmer, film maker and photographer, came to Monnington Court in 1965. Since then, they have worked to restore the house, create a garden from the rough meadow that surrounded the house, which is now a setting for Angela's sculpture and set up the Morgan Horse Foundation Farm.

Arriving, we passed orchards labelled 'Bulmers', and then as we alighted the coach, our first sight of large sculptures, very much in the public ilk, the white walls and ménage of the Morgan Horse stables, the mile long Monnington Walk, made famous by Sir John Betjeman and the Victorian Diarist, Kilvert and in front of us the magnificent old house. A white peacock strutted his stuff, although he didn't display his full glory until tea time. (I missed that.) No wonder there were artists sitting at their easels, and we hadn't even got inside.

The house is made up of 3 sections, the earliest being the 'Moot Hall', one of the largest preserved in the west of England and completed c1230. At the other end is a group of small 15th century cottages, and between the two, the middle section, built by Thomas Tomkyns in the mid 1600s. He also planted the Monnington Walk to celebrate his becoming an MP in 1623.

We started in the downstairs of the first cottage, now John's workroom, with its huge beams, suggesting grain used to be stored above, a fabulous fireplace and very powerful photographs, some of miners etc taken in the North c 1960s.

Moving on, passing a wonderful collection of more than 20 hats, we entered the drawing room of Tomkyn's house. The carved screen here, with some splendid medieval figures in it, is a collection of pieces, some of which came from Monnington church and at the other end a fine decorated ceiling, above the place where the court was held.

Continuing, through the beautifully restored corridors and rooms, housing collections of fascinating objects and furniture, there was just too much to take in. The kitchen with a beautiful butter making table, the downstairs of the 'Moot Hall', now the dining room, but once home to the cattle, the upstairs hall, now a bedroom, theatrically dressed with banners, the solar, a warren of bedrooms.....time was running out.

I headed into the garden, after all I had been looking forward to the sculpture and was determined to do the sculpture walk round the lake. It was all a bit of a gallop. Many of Angela Connor's sculptures are portrait busts. Near the house sits Noel Coward, looking on a ring of portraits, including family members. A new Avenue of Sculptures, with busts of the poets, musicians and members of the Royal Family, is the latest edition to the garden. Others that caught my eye as I went round the lake were 'Parting' in memory of her sister, a bust of Mill Reef by Paul Mellors.

There was just time to stick my head inside the beautiful Norman church and glimpse the Morgan foal and its mother out in the ménage. Monnington Court is a magical place where I could have spent much longer and I would have loved to have joined the painters, perhaps one day I will return.

Deborah Martin

KILPECK: ST MARY AND ST DAVID

One of the particular pleasures of our Herefordshire visit was the exceptional variety of places we went to. This even extended to the two small churches we saw: Lethaby's 'convincing and impressive' 20th century Church, (as Pevsner describes it), and Kilpeck, possibly completed 1143. And, as with all our visits, we had an enthusiastic guide, in this case James Bailey, who was delighted to share his knowledge and ideas with us.

Whereas the Lethaby has a clear, if not untroubled, history, Kilpeck appears to be a site about which almost every detail could be argued and debated. This even includes the name of the village which the Oxford Dictionary of Place Names claims means a corner or nook where animals can be snared, while the church guide states that it derives from the words for cell and Pedic, so may have meant the cell of a local saint or holy man!

The church itself is Romanesque, or Norman, and we were lucky enough to visit it in the late afternoon sunshine, so that the most astonishing aspects of the church were fairly easily visible. These are the wonderful carved figures which decorate the doorways, and the strange corbels and monster heads. We had already been told that the site of the churchyard was egg shaped, and probably therefore pre-Christian, and indeed, as Richard Mabey, among others, has pointed out, many churches were built on the sites of much older, pagan, sacred places. The carvings on the exterior of Kilpeck suggest that such origins were not far below the surface in the minds of their creators. Of course many medieval churches, and indeed manuscripts are alive with creatures not at all associated with Christian traditions, or others which Christianity absorbed and made its own over time. Because it seems likely that the iconography of the sculptures originated from a variety of sources, from classical to Celtic, Scandinavian to Middle Eastern, we have been left with a rich mix over whose meaning modern interpreters can argue. But what is not in doubt is the extraordinary richness and diversity, as well as the liveliness of the work around the south door, west window and the corbels. The door was surrounded by snakes, foliage and warriors, monsters, as well as the more obviously Christian vine.

The corbels especially, appeared to me to exemplify the seepage between the pagan and the Christian, as though the carvers were looking not to offend either. The most notorious of these is the Sheela-na-gig, suggesting a far more ancient form of imagery. (The French painter, Gustave Courbet, caught her meaning with his *L'Origene du Monde* of 1866). Some of the corbels just look playful, the hare and the dog, the poor old muzzled bear, the dancers (or are they lovers?), things which might still be directly observed.

So much of the Church and its decoration fitted into the surroundings the churchyard itself and the landscape beyond. Our guide wanted us to believe that the rib vaulting signified water, and that the building has a stream beneath the apse; if this is true then the church is even more literally related to its place. Yet Kilpeck's sculptural style was drawn from a variety of cultures, (though it's now known as the Herefordshire School), so as with the gardens we make and visit, we continue to take what we can to make something new.

Sue Wragg

HEREFORD CATHEDRAL GARDENS

WHITLEY COURT

We approached the house from the Visitor Centre by taking the Lakeside Walk from where we had an excellent view of the splendid colonnaded entrance to the north side. Along the way we were treated to glimpses of the Woodland Walk and the historic Rhododendron Collection but sadly time did not allow us to explore these further. The lake itself is home to white swan mussels that indicate the freshness of the water.

In the 17th century, Whitley Court was a modest manor house. By the 19th century it was a vast Italianate estate, the house designed by the architect

Samuel Daukes and the garden by William Andrews Nesfield. The Foleys of Dudley were responsible for the transformation and eight generations of the family lived in the house. In 1920 it was bought by Sir Herbert Smith, known as Piggy, a carpet manufacturer. He reduced staff levels and lived in just part of the house. In 1937 much of the interior of the house was destroyed by fire. It was never rebuilt and in 1954 it was bought by an antique dealer who stripped the remaining house and grounds of everything he could sell. There are still marks on some of the columns at the entrances where he attempted to move them but failed.

Fortunately the shell of the house and the grounds have been sympathetically restored by English Heritage who have recaptured the splendour of the Italianate house and its formal gardens, situated to the East and the South of the house. The garden to the East contains a copy of a highly elaborate French-style parterre and the focal point is the fountain of Flora. This no longer works partly, because the statue of Flora was removed by the antique dealer, but it is currently being restored. The larger South garden is also laid out with parterres and features the magnificent Perseus and Andromeda fountain. This does still work, although not entirely in its former splendour, and it can be seen in action for a period each hour. Our party assembled in front of it as it started up and posed for a group photograph followed by a presentation to our excellent coach driver, John, who has accompanied us on several holidays and is retiring this year.

We ended our tour of the house and garden with a visit to the conservatory or orangery which was one of the largest to be found in any English country house. We could still see some of the black and white marble floor and one of the stone baskets of flowers on the rear wall carved by the Scottish sculptor, James Forsyth (1827-1910). The surviving outer shell of the building gives a clue to its former opulence but we have to imagine the one and a half inch thick glass that filled each archway from floor to ceiling and the great glass curved roof. A single Camellia is from the original plant collection, more Camellias and vines have been added recently.

Our visit and our holiday were satisfactorily rounded off in the excellent tea rooms (not English Heritage) where we could buy not only delicious scones and cakes but also a selection of reasonably priced plants, LRGT Heaven!

Gill Knight