



Patron: The Viscount Ashbrook
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Newsletter

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- ✦ Pleasing Melancholy: the past, present and future of our cemeteries
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- ✦ Allotments and the Priestnall Site

Some future events:

- ✦ Manley Knoll, an Arts & Crafts Garden – Tuesday 14 May
- ✦ All-day coach trip to the Dower House, Morville and Morville Hall – Saturday 15 June
- ✦ A Plantswoman's Cottage Garden – Thursday 4 July
- ✦ Birtles Hall – Tuesday 13 August



It was a cold Spring night at Arley in Cheshire, but Lord Ashbrook whisked us off to enjoy Spring of last year on the other side of 'the pond'.

Lord and Lady Ashbrook's visit to America in March and April 2012 was the result of an invitation from friend of the family, P. Allen Smith. Allen first visited Arley when he was studying at Manchester University many years ago. There he met Lord Ashbrook's father, Desmond and was introduced to Lady Elizabeth Ashbrook. Despite their fifty-year age gap, not to

mention the 4,000 mile distance between their respective homes, they became firm friends.

Allen was born in Tennessee, the fourth generation of a family of nursery owners and it was to study garden design and history that he came to Manchester. Today he is a well-known TV and radio presenter, designer and gardener, based in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Last year Allen arranged for Lord Ashbrook to give three lectures. The first was at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library in Delaware. This was built by the

DuPont family – not only at the forefront of the American industrial revolution, but also prominent horticulturalists. The museum houses a collection of American works of art.

While in the area the Ashbrooks were able to visit a number of gardens. At the Morris Arboretum at the University of Pennsylvania, they were shown round by its Director who is also a plant hunter. It has many sculptures in the grounds. The Chanticleer Pleasure Garden in Pennsylvania was developed by Adolph Rosengarten, sen. in the early twentieth century. It is 48 acres in extent and one of the finest gardens in America. Adolph, jun. worked at Bletchley Park during the Second World War.



The third visit was to Longwood Gardens in Philadelphia. This covers a thousand acres and has a million visitors each year. The enormous conservatory (see front page) was built in 1919 and has since been expanded to cover, currently, 4.5 acres. Longwood House is the largest octagonal house in America, but it was never finished. Construction was disrupted by the Civil War.



Leaving the North-East of America, Lord and Lady Ashbrook travelled nearly 1,200 miles south-west to Little Rock, Arkansas where they met up with Allen and attended a dedication ceremony of a newly constructed rose garden built in memory of Lady Elizabeth Ashbrook, Lord Ashbrook's mother.

They also visited the Clinton Library – which includes a replica of the Oval Office at the White House. They were shown around Rosalie Mansion, Natchez, a popular tourist spot. The Greek revival style house

dates from 1823 and was owned by a cotton millionaire family. During the American Civil War it was used as General Grant's headquarters.

Travelling further south, the Ashbrooks arrived at New Orleans where they were never far from music. Having travelled 1,600 miles and spent time in three very different states, Lord Ashbrook noted the way that climate affected the plants. He treated us to wonderful photos of cherries in full and dense bloom and likewise magnolias, the state flower of Louisiana. They saw several varieties of yellow Magnolias, which began to be bred in the 1950s, including examples of Magnolia 'Elizabeth' – the tree planted at Arley last year in honour of the Queen's Jubilee (and, by a fortunate coincidence, also memorialising Lord Ashbrook's mother).

Sue Bartlett



The photos of Longwood have been provided by Ed Bennis who also recalls:

“Sir Peter Shepherd (who was born in Birkenhead) was the landscape architect consultant at Longwood. Said he only did little things there and most were quick drawings for the workmen...not entirely true from my research. He designed the new entrance and building at Longwood, but said he left the planting up to them as they were much better at that than he was. Peter had also redesigned the water lily ponds”

Ed Bennis



Humphry Repton: landscape gardener and illusionist

This lecture was dedicated to the memory of Howard Talbot

A record number of CGT members and guests braved the January snow to hear our Winter Lecture, given by Ed Bennis, at the historic venue of Bishop Lloyd's Palace in Chester.

Last year CGT purchased a facsimile copy of the Repton Red Book of Aston Park, for research purposes, and the Winter Lecture had been planned as a way of sharing this purchase with our members. Sadly the planned lecture became dedicated to the memory of Howard Talbot of Aston Park who died in November 2012 (obituary published in the January 2013 Newsletter) and was attended by his wife Christine Talbot and their son Charles. Thanks to them several photographs of the remnants of the Repton landscape at Aston were shown and compared with his original watercolours.

This was a lecture with fine credentials, Ed Bennis, who last year stepped down as the Chair of CGT, has a background in landscape history, conservation, design and authorship. We were also privileged that Lord and Lady Grey of Codnor, CGT members, brought their original copy of the High Legh Red Book for members to view and to share the excitement of examining an actual Red Book.

Distilling a long career, we learnt some of Repton's background in business, where he failed, but also that he was a skilled watercolourist and early drawings of his home in Essex gave us a strong indication of his career direction and of his famous "view in" and "view out" in the Red Books to come. Chronologically, Repton followed Lancelot Brown when, significantly, estate size was reducing leading to the need for a new type of landscape for the newly wealthy industrialists and merchants. His first paid commission was in 1788 at Catton Park in Norwich as a Landscape Gardener (a term credited to Repton).

As the estates were now smaller Repton created illusions, concealing the flaws and displaying the beauty of the place, disguising boundaries and defects, or creating a depth of view in comparatively small spaces. Driveways "lifted" the house, so that the view was upwards and lengthened and lakes appeared to be joined within the landscape and "prospects" borrowed – all to deceive the eye. Designs were spoken of as having unity, a term held in regard today within design. Repton's famous Red Books (bound in red Moroccan leather) gave clients beautifully presented "before" and "after" images, with "slips" that could be withdrawn to display the new design (see Tatton Park photos above right). Many of his techniques are now well established in garden and landscape design, but the imagery of modern CAD misses the magic of the hand drawn and hand tinted landscape.



*Tatton Park - before and after designs, with "slip"
Photos by Ed Bennis, with thanks to Cheshire East County Council*



From Ed's depth of knowledge, he gave us examples of where Brown had swept away terraces from houses but Repton re-introduced the domestic scale with terraces (see Armley House photos, overleaf) and enormous baskets, shrubberies and flowers such as at Brighton Pavilion.

Sheep grazed in the near distance to create scale (and to keep the grass trimmed) with canopies lifted to create distant "borrowed" views (see photos of Armley House).

Where buildings, such as workers' cottages, had to be retained (no movement of whole villages as his predecessor had done) these became picturesque with thatch and trellises and incorporated into the new landscape (see Tatton Park photos).

Repton was also an author, starting in 1790 with Peacock's Polite Repository or pocket companion. This was followed in 1795 with Sketches and Hints on Landscape Gardening, and in 1803 by Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening with 1816 seeing the publication of Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening.

Repton also produced many watercolours and architectural designs for interiors, apparently falling out with notable architects of the time.



Armley House - before (above) and after (below) designs
Photos by courtesy of the Paul Mellon Collection, USA



Finally giving us some of the history, with illustrated examples, of Repton's work in Cheshire we learnt that Repton created Red Books for Rode Hall in 1790, Crewe Hall in 1791, High Legh in 1791, Tatton in 1791, Aston Park in 1793 and Hooton Hall in 1802.

Ed talked us through Aston Hall landscape where agriculture was now important, in contrast to the earlier Brown landscapes. Repton developed his characteristic serpentine hedges, here incorporated with wire stock control fences, with different levels of greenery to screen the corn! A new entrance was planned - a back road to the stables that is still in existence. The borrowed prospect was very important to prevent the domestic space from feeling too enclosed, but we are now seeing "garden plantations" and possibly the precursor of the later Victorian domestic pleasure ground. So much of Repton not only exists within the landscape, but in the garden styles of later times.

This brief summary does not give Ed justice for the depth of observation and breadth of example contained in the lecture, and we thank Ed for an excellent lecture. Hopefully those who were unable to attend may look at Repton afresh and some might even join the Research and Recording Team helping to discover many more of the wonderful landscapes in Cheshire!

It was an absolute privilege to be able to view the High Legh Red Book and our thanks go to Lord and Lady Grey for generously bringing such a precious record for us to see.

Thank you to Ed Bennis, Lord and Lady Grey, Christine Talbot and to all those who attended.

Jane Gooch

Pleasing melancholy: past, present and future for our cemeteries

As our speaker, Matthew Hyde, pointed out it was fitting that this lecture was held in St Michael's Church, itself a burial place. Matthew's Lecture was entertaining, informative and thought provoking and ranged from the medieval to the present day, with many illustrations of cemeteries in Cheshire and farther afield.

Many of the early cemeteries were created by non-conformists, for example the Quaker burial grounds. Prior to the Burial Acts of 1852-57 that established a national system of public cemeteries, the cemeteries were private and often created by Joint Stock Companies. Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris (1804) in Arcadian style was much copied although in the UK larger cemeteries were not created until the 1820/30s. John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843) published On the Laying Out, Planting and Managing of Cemeteries in 1843 which, amongst many other things, promoted the planting of evergreens in cemeteries. This work influenced the future design of cemeteries (it can be read on-line at google books).

Following health concerns about the unsanitary condition of overflowing Church burial grounds the 1850s' Burial Acts saw the creation of many Victorian cemeteries by local Burial Boards, with mortuary chapels for Anglican and non-conformists and a wide range of memorials.

In 1871, although cremation was illegal at this time, in Ashton-under-Lyne Cemetery (perhaps because of a British India Connection) a memorial specifies that ashes were buried. Cremation was legalised in the 1880s and is now the dominant mode of interment (80%). This influenced the design of cemeteries with walls and gardens of remembrance being created.

World War one saw the creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission to deal with the huge numbers of soldiers killed in other countries and the decision taken not to repatriate. The cemeteries created were simple with plain, minimally carved, head stones laid out in rows in lawns and with no distinction between officers and men.

More recent times have seen the introduction of Tree and Green Burials and areas set aside for the burial of young children.

By their very nature cemeteries have a limited life as burial grounds and many have become neglected, derelict and potentially dangerous places. Over the last decade these problems are starting to be addressed by various means and throughout the country local action groups are lobbying for improvement, taking action themselves and finding new and innovative ways to tackle the problems.

Matthew obviously has a great enthusiasm for the cemetery landscape and history with its 'order and chaos' and its 'over-the-top' architecture and if he has encouraged you to visit and explore cemeteries English Heritage's 2007 '*Paradise Preserved: An introduction to the assessment, evaluation, conservation and management of historic cemeteries*' can be downloaded from their website and the Shire booklet '*The Victorian Cemetery*' by Sarah Rutherford is also very informative.

Susan Barker

Bluebell Walks

It's been a rather cold spring, so bluebells may not be much in evidence at these planned bluebell walks...



Combermere Abbey

Annual Walk and Plant Sale ~ Sunday 28th April 2013

This two-mile Bluebell Walk Event, is a fun day out for the whole family. Visitors have the rare opportunity of seeing the beautiful location of the C12th Combermere Abbey – dappled woodlands, picturesque lake – while enjoying carpets of these fragrant blue native flowers.

The walled garden with its magnificently restored Glasshouse will also be open for guests to enjoy – walk through the world's only fruit tree maze, an espaliered labyrinth of redcurrants, gooseberries and over 25 varieties of apple and pear tree, its blossoms are a sight to behold.

Dogs are welcome (on a lead). In addition to the Plant Sale, there will be hot and cold refreshments available.

Gates open at 1pm and registration for the last walk is at 4pm. The event will close at 5pm. Wear appropriate footwear for woodland walking. The woodland paths are not suited to prams and pushchairs.

Admission costs for the Bluebell Walk are: Adults £5; Children under 16 - £2

Free for babies in carriers. Parking is free of charge.

Tushingham Hall

Peter Moore-Dutton, the owner of the romantic Tushingham Hall near Malpas, has told us about a Bluebell Walk there. The garden and woods are open from 2 – 5 o'clock on Sunday 28th April. Entry is £3.00 and proceeds go to Tushingham Church and the Hospice of the Good Shepherd. Refreshments will be available. For details, please contact Sarah Collard on 01948 860294. The address of the Bluebell Walk is: Tushingham Hall, Whitchurch, Shropshire, SY13 4QP



Freyda Taylor adds:

Tushingham Hall was originally an early moated farmhouse which was remodelled for Daniel Vawdrey who purchased it in 1814.¹ It is thought that the park and ornamental lake would have been created at the same time. The Hall is Grade II listed.

The remains of a kitchen garden lies alongside the Hall together with old farm buildings. There are plenty of ancient trees to look at in this delightful situation.

The Bluebell Walk is around the lake through an old shrubbery of rhododendrons and then back on higher ground looking down on the lake and the Hall. Mowl and Mako² state that "it is the perfect instance of a Regency park, essentially Georgian in character..."

¹ de Figueiredo, Peter and Julian Treuherz, Cheshire Country Houses, (Chichester: Phillimore, 1988)

² Mowl, Timothy and Marion Mako, The Historic Gardens of England: Cheshire, (Bristol: Redcliffe Press Ltd, 2008)

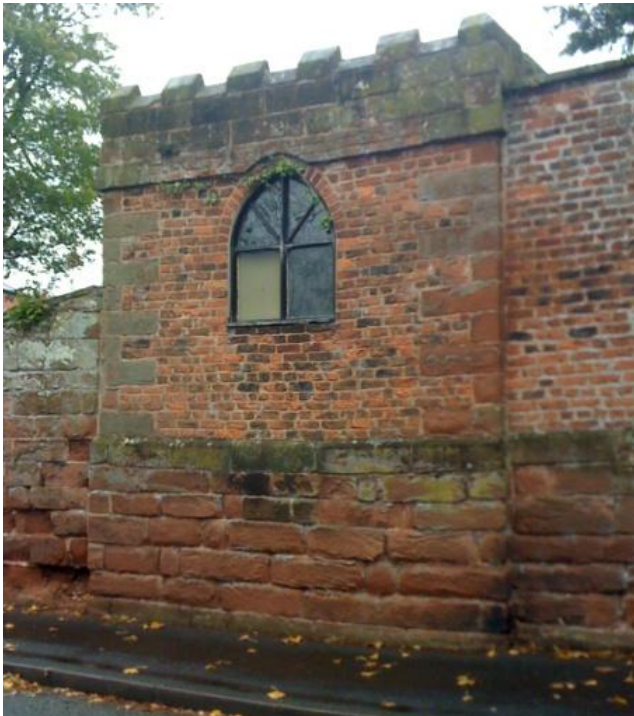
G is for Gazebo

The origin of the word 'Gazebo' is unknown but its use was first noted in William and John Halfpenny's 1750 book, *Rural Architecture in the Chinese Taste*.¹ They may have coined it from the verb 'to gaze' or to look.

A gazebo is a garden or public structure, not always but usually having a roof and open sides. They are made from a variety of materials – wood, stone, brick, metal and more recently plastics and fabric. Their principal purposes are to provide a place from which to view the scenery or other subjects of interest, to relax in the open air or to shelter from the sun.

The Japanese used gazebos as teahouses. In other cultures they have served as places to worship or meditate, to cook, to read poetry aloud or even as bandstands. Chinese garden pavilions were the inspiration for Western gazebos from C18th onwards.

Most gazebos are completely detached and may be sited in raised isolated spots. Some have been constructed in cupolas at the top of houses, and yet others are built into retaining walls. Some, which might be called *belvederes*, have been erected high up over particularly stunning views.



Christleton Hall Gazebo

A wide variety of historic gazebos are found throughout Cheshire. In Christleton alone there are two fine brick and stone gazebos built into the retaining walls of properties. The first, with its castellated top, is at Christleton Hall. It is said that it was constructed so that ladies could view the passage of life outside the walls without themselves being seen. The other one at Christleton House is again of stone and brick, this time with a conical metal roof. It is more puzzling as it stands above a narrow track between the house and the church graveyard and there are no windows on the outer walls.

At Hare Hill, near Alderley Edge, there is a fine example of a gazebo that looks inwards rather than at the world beyond. It forms part of the retaining wall of a walled garden and visitors can sit and enjoy the tranquility.

At Tatton Park, as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, a silver-coloured metal gazebo with diamond patterns and a crown on top has been constructed. It stands on the footprint of the original gazebo, which was part of the pleasure grounds designed for Lady Charlotte by Lewis William Wyatts in the mid-19th century. It 'complements the arbour and fountain aspects of this area of the formal gardens, all popular features of the 'gardenesque' style of garden commissioned by stately home owners at the start of the 19th century.'²

Similar silvered gazebos can be found in the walled gardens at Arley Hall³ and between the garden and the lake at Capesthorpe Hall.⁴

Gwen Goodhew



Tatton Park gazebo erected in the place of an earlier structure



The map of the Hermitage near Holmes Chapel appears to show a pair of gazebos: 1767 Map of the estates of Thomas Bayley Hall CALS: D5173

References:

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazebo>

² <http://marketingcheshire.blog.com/2012/07/12/jubilee-gazebo-to-grace-tatton-s-pleasure-grounds/>

³ <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2149462>

⁴ <http://www.smithyironworks.com/capesthorpe.php>

Allotments and the Priestnall site in Heaton Mersey, Stockport

This talk was given to the Cheshire Gardens Trust on 24 August 2012

Foreword

I thought I would start with a few words on the history of how allotments came into being.

Allotments in England can be dated back to 1793 when the earliest known were created in Wiltshire by landowners letting land to agricultural labourers. The reasons were many and the pressure came from liberal thinkers and landowners on moral grounds to reduce lawlessness and drunkenness, improve moral standards, to reduce the call on poor relief and to stem the undercurrent of political unrest and fear of riots by aggrieved and desperate agricultural labourers severely affected by the loss of use of common land by the Enclosure Acts of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Almost all the sites established before 1830 were in the south of England and Midlands with only one further north, in Cheshire, at Nantwich created around 1817. The majority of ploholders were agricultural labourers but some were handloom weavers and domestic outworkers.

There was a significant rise in the number of sites in the 1830s/40s following riots in 1830/1 by agricultural labourers demanding increased wages. Churches and farms were damaged and several rioters were executed.

Allotments gradually spread further north, but it was not until the 1870s/80s that the idea of urban allotments took hold and by then it was the labourers themselves who created the pressure for land on material grounds, to improve their standard of living and there was a shift away from land provided by private landowners to the typical provider being a public authority.

This is the same today: most allotment sites are provided by town or parish councils but there are still private landlords – individuals, companies, the Church, charitable trusts and of course, recently, bodies like the National Trust or farmers letting a few fields under land share schemes.

Site

In Stockport there are 39 sites owned by the council, ranging from 2 plots landlocked behind houses to our Priestnall site which is the largest at 5.75 acres with 87 full sized plots.

This site was first established in 1934 and then extended in 1958. I have lived in the area all my life and I remember as a child walking past the fields of vegetables, later to become the west end of the site, and the farmer letting us take swedes home to scoop out into Hallowe'en lanterns.

A few sites are run by the council, so a council officer lets plots and arranges for maintenance to be done, but most sites are run to a greater or lesser degree by

their members as an Association. The Trustees of the Association have a site lease with the council and each ploholder has a Tenancy Agreement with the Association. These are legal documents drawn up by the council stipulating the terms and conditions of the lease.

Our site is totally managed by the Trustees and committee: we are responsible for letting plots, giving notice to quit if plots are not kept to a satisfactory standard, collecting the rent and paying it to the council whether the site is fully let or not, dealing with health and safety matters and running the site on a day to day basis. We receive a percentage rebate for doing this.

The council is responsible for the mature trees on the site, so any remedial work is carried out by them, but we are responsible for the maintenance of the site: we maintain the roadways with stone we purchase, we pay a local farmer to cut the internal hedges and we cut the external hedges by hand as there is no access for a tractor on the public footpaths around the site. We mend fences and cut the grass.

We always have in mind that we hold the land in trust for future generations, so have to ensure that no one does anything on their plot which compromises its future use for horticulture.

Reasons for taking a plot

There are various reasons why people are interested in taking on a plot:

1. They enjoy growing vegetables and have run out of room in the garden or have now moved to a flat or a smaller garden;
2. They think it will be cheaper than buying veg. – (it's difficult to quantify this, it depends if you count everything including your own time. I think it is not a sound reason);
3. They want fresh air and exercise – (yes, and it is cheaper than gym membership!);
4. They want to know what they are eating – chemical free;
5. They want their children to know where food comes from;
6. Increasingly in this modern stressed society, they want a place where they can get away from it all – and it definitely has therapeutic benefits.

Plot sizes

The size of the first allotments could be as much as one acre, later reduced in the middle of the 19th century to half an acre; then in the 20th century the norm became 10 rods, i.e. 300 sq.yds.(250 sq.m.) (90ft x 30ft.) which was said to sustain a family of 4 throughout the year.

Nowadays with more young people, families with young children and people working full time, the

general requirement is for smaller plots. On our site there have been half plots for probably 40 years: I've had a plot here for 35 years and I started with a half. The desire to have an allotment has tended to go in phases, with demand fluctuating with changing economic and social pressures. Ten or twelve years ago we had plenty of vacant plots, so we decided to reduce the size of plots further and let quarter plots. These have proved popular and act as "taster plots": those ploholders who really settle in soon find they want a bigger size, some with more limited time are happy to remain with the quarter and a few have found it too much for them, so gave up.

Out of the 87 full plots, we now have 29 full, about 80 halves and 52 quarters. It obviously varies as smaller plots go back together and others are split, but as long as we always maintain a stock of full plots we should be able to offer flexibility for the future.

Age profile

The age profile of ploholders has dramatically altered over the past 10-15 years. When I first came I must have been the youngest on site by at least 20 years and probably over 80% of ploholders were retired. I was trying to garden organically and caused great amusement for the older fraternity as I put small pieces of carpet around my brassicas to prevent cabbage root fly laying its eggs at the bottom of the stem for the resultant caterpillar to munch through the plant. (By the way, it does work!) Now most of the people on site wish to strive towards growing organically.

Now about one third of ploholders are under 45 years of age and about half are of retirement age. There is a fair percentage of women working plots on their own – about 30% and there are a few families with young children.

The old image of elderly men in flat caps has definitely gone and with it the plot lay-out has changed.



Plot design

Some ploholders still go for the traditional long rows across the width of the plot, without paths – walking across the soil to plant, pick and weed, hoeing afterwards, but many on our site now have permanently delineated paths, often formed from

woodchips with growing beds of about 3-4ft wide in between, which may stretch the full width of the plot or may be broken up into smaller beds. Some beds are edged with wooden planks, so-called "raised beds", which I suppose make it psychologically easier to keep the plot tidy by maintaining one bed at a visit.

A big advantage of narrow permanent beds is that you do not need to stand on the soil, so not compacting it and it may only require a light forking over or manure incorporating without heavy digging. Few people seem to double dig these days once the ground has been improved into a good soil structure.

You may have seen the Gardeners' World series last year in which Joe Swift took on an allotment plot in London and designed it with diamond and triangular shaped beds – (rather a waste of space!). We do have a couple of ploholders who must have been watching his exploits!

Men seem to go for serried ranks of regimented, dead straight rows, whereas women tend to be more relaxed in planting and sowing.



Crops

The first allotment plots grew mainly potatoes and grains - wheat and barley, then by the middle of the 19th century the range of vegetables increased considerably.

Now we see a lot more "exotic" plants being grown, for example butternut squash, peppers, artichokes, asparagus and sweet potato. Some people experiment with fruit like grapes and kiwi. In recent years the press exhortation to eat "superfoods" has resulted in numerous blueberry bushes and goji berries – the latter caused a scare 2 or 3 years ago with fears that those imported from the Far East may contain virus which could affect commercial potato and tomato crops because they are in the same family. DEFRA then declared that plants originating from Europe could be certified as clear.

In Stockport we can grow vegetables, fruit and flowers, but in some parts of the country flowers are not allowed and in others you must grow flowers on the first metre of the plot.

There are 6 livestock sites in Stockport – we are not one – where mainly chickens or pigeons can be kept.

Bees may be acceptable but it is up to individual sites to decide on their suitability depending on the location and surrounding features. We have discussed it but have decided against on our site.

Effort

An allotment requires frequent attention, even with a small plot, to control the weeds and maintain the surrounding grass paths. It is not like nipping out of the back door and pottering every evening for a few minutes. Few plotters are lucky enough to have their plot at the bottom of their garden (although some do on our site) and it is a different matter when you have to make a definite effort to go to the plot, whether walking, cycling or driving.

Organic growing requires much more time and effort than if you use chemicals: regular visits are necessary to spot the first signs of, for example, disease or pests and to take the appropriate action – dig diseased plants up or smudge blackfly with your fingers before the infestation takes hold or use a soap based spray.

Community links

A local primary school makes periodic visits to the site with their after school club. The children have helped to plant cabbages and potatoes and learnt about different vegetables and herbs, enjoying smelling and tasting them.

Another school adjacent to the site has its own vegetable patch and orchard. A couple of our plotters go across to the school to help and give advice. Children from this school recently judged our scarecrow competition and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.



Heaton Mersey Village Conservation Group hold a farmer's market each year and we are invited to take a stall to sell our vegetables, fruit and flowers at their Harvest Fair held in a local park in September. Under allotment rules plotters are not allowed to grow and sell produce for personal profit but they can donate the produce and the takings go into Society funds.

Special projects

There has been increasing interest on sites throughout the country in improving the infrastructure and facilities of the sites, often achieved by tapping into

funding from, for example, the Lottery, which councils are unable to access.

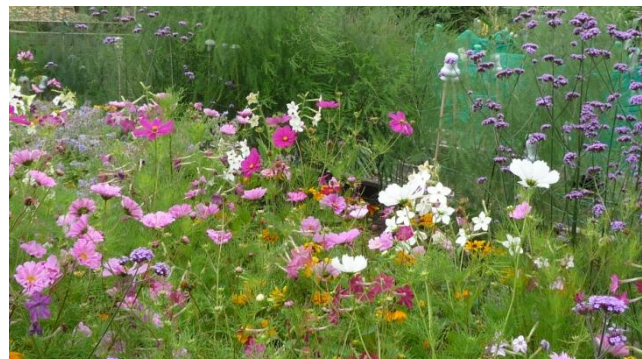
In 2002 we decided to create facilities for disabled people as we had a local group of wheel chair users on site who could only watch as their helpers did the gardening. We raised funds through grants and special events to build 2 feet high raised beds suitable for wheel chair users and then in 2004 built a toilet to disabled standards with a mess room attached.

We have no electricity on site so have to use a generator and battery system. We have investigated renewable energy, wind and solar, but unfortunately neither is a viable option for our site.

There is a recycling area for woodchips, used for internal paths on the plots and leaves delivered from the council in the autumn, for making leaf mould and for incorporating into the soil to improve the structure.

One of the fund-raising projects was to produce a recipe book to utilise excess production of fruit and vegetables. Plotters were asked to contribute their methods of using their over-production. It has been very successful and there have been many complimentary remarks about the recipes – the book is appropriately entitled "gluts".

In 2005, Stockport council asked our site to be included with its entry in Britain in Bloom. We had only 6 weeks before the judging, so it was a mad panic to get all the plotters involved and working hard to get their plots and paths in good order. Until then very few flowers were grown on plots, but I think people thought Britain in Bloom equals flowers, so a lot more were planted and this has continued and expanded so that now there is a lot of colour as well as a good source of nectar and pollen for the insects. More people are trying companion planting to reduce pests and in some cases it does seem to be effective.



Open Days have become an annual event since our first in 2003, when the National Allotment Society encouraged sites across the country to promote allotments. This has proved effective and we enjoy welcoming the public to come and walk round the site and ask questions. There are stalls selling plants, produce, cakes and preserves and refreshments.

Last year we ran a scarecrow competition on Open Day for the first time and this year it took the theme of "Kings and Queens" to celebrate the Jubilee.

Our site now has a long waiting list which enables us to put some pressure on ploholders to keep their plots well-maintained. The improvements have contributed to our winning Best Site in Stockport for the past 2 years.



The future of allotments

In the past few years there has been a quite sudden and increasing surge in popularity in having an allotment, mainly from people wanting to grow organically. It has become a fashionable fad rather than growing vegetables to supplement the family larder as in the past.

I hope though that the revived interest is sustained and I suspect it will be. During my allotment career, previous peaks in demand for plots have usually only occurred when the price of vegetables rocketed due to seasonal shortages and when prices resumed a more normal level, interest in “growing your own” dissipated. Now I think the reasons are more deep seated and I look forward to a continuing healthy interest in what is a fantastic and productive leisure activity.

Fay Bravey

Acknowledgement

The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873 by Jeremy Burchardt (2002)

Heritage Lottery Success!

The next phase of the Caldwell Project – ‘Sharing the Heritage’ – is now steaming ahead thanks to the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund. It builds on the work we have already started: recording the oral history of family, staff and customers, and transcribing the information from the ledgers held at the offices of the Cheshire Records Office.

We are now working with our contractor to build an exciting website on which we can hold all the information we currently have – and will continue to gather – and which will be accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

The exhibition which we used at RHS Tatton last year has been supplemented with additional information and is on show at Knutsford Library from the middle of April into May. The plan is to produce a new exhibition to move around the county, sometimes accompanied by a talk given by one of the team.

Finally, we plan to produce a book providing yet another way for people to ‘Share the Heritage’.

So if you would like to become involved in any way, have skills to contribute or simply want to join in, please get in touch with one of the project team.

Pat Alexander, tel: 01743 872084; e-mail: patriciaalexander@tiscali.co.uk

Barbara Moth: tel: 01606 46228; e-mail: barbara.moth@btinternet.com

Joy Uings, tel: 0161 969 3300; e-mail: joy.uings@btconnect.com

Janet Horne: tel: 01625 523013; e-mail: janet_horne@btinternet.com

Christine Wilcox Baker, tel: 01565 733 612; e-mail: c.w-b@virgin.net

Moir Stevenson, tel: 0161 8333722; e-mail : m.stevenson999@btinternet.com



Janet Horne, with exhibition (above) and detail (below)



The 1840s was a boom time for the building of railways. Such excitement! They brought within reach of the day tripper places previously inaccessible. I found this eulogy in the Manchester Times. Was it written to share the writer's pleasure of his day out? Or was it at the behest of the railway Directors, to encourage more paying passengers? Or maybe the Earl of Shrewsbury commissioned it to bring paying visitors to his stately house and garden. What would he have thought of today's

Alton Towers

If you are plotting a pleasure excursion, take our advice reader; let your ride be by railway through the valley of the Churnet, and let Alton Towers be your place of destination. You may come back no better than you went – that is, if your eyes be beetle eyes, and you yourself as dull as a post; but assuming that you have ordinary perception of what is beautiful in nature, and of what in art militant is splendidly triumphant, you cannot come back in *that* way – we defy you.

Charming is the valley of the Churnet, and pleasant it is to ride through it, even by railway, whatever may be said against that mode of travelling by “queer old stagers.” And a glorious place is Alton Towers; a place to look at with freest admiration, and to remember as lingeringly as if it were a vision vouchsafed from some happier world. We spent there, of late, some hours of a wet, and (in a weather sense) a most miserable day; yet was the visit anything but an unpleasant one, and it now looks beautiful enough in the recollection; for Memory has already shaken off all the drops of discomfort which might otherwise have stained her robe.

It is not our intention to describe this Churnet Valley; with Alton Towers, the seat of the Earl of Shrewsbury, is our present business, and we therefore alight from the train at Alton, and pedestrianally address ourselves to the short remainder of our journey. The railway station itself is in the valley; and to reach the elevation of Alton Towers we must mount the hill to the left; we therefore take immediate steps to ascend, and a flight of them, which assist us, soon puts to flight every difficulty. And now we find ourselves in a lane, made pleasant with mossy stonework, and with the purple bells of foxglove, and with the green and feathery garniture of ferns, and still pleasanter with the beautiful hill scenery, which continually attracts our eyes leftwards as we ascend. And fain would we linger here, so delightful is the place; but foresight and a prudent balancing of advantages prevent us, for the Towers are before us; and although minutes spent here might be rich as drops of silver – to accept them would be to forego minutes as precious as drops of gold.

Less for hunger's sake than for the ticket's, we halt at the inn to which a field-path, leading from this lane, presently conducts us. Our order for dinner having satisfactorily excited mine host's complaisance, we are provided with a card of admission to the mansion and grounds. “The principal part of the mansion”, we are informed by an anonymous authority, “faces the north-east, and is of considerable extent. Directly

opposite the Weaver Hills, in front, is a fine piece of water, brought from the adjoining hills; and on the other side is a castellated building in good taste, which are the offices. The general style of the architecture is gothic, rather irregular, having been built at different times, and flanked by terraces. The state-rooms are in the west wing, and are terminated by a large square tower; the tower of the chapel, though slender, is elegant.” Impatient to verify this description, we hasten forwards, and soon find ourselves in the immediate vicinity of the mansion. On a viaduct which is formed by an arched entrance to the gardens, we obtain our first assurance of the delightful character of the place. One glance to the leftward suffices to convince us that we are upon enchanted ground. From what awaits us in these entrancing gardens, nothing in the mansion itself, we feel assured, can long detain us; we therefore hurry forward to the Towers – as prudent children, when they eat plum cakes, save the *plummiest* to the last.

A brief survey of the building itself reveals at once that our anonymous informant was not far out when he concluded the edifice to be “rather irregular”. To look at it, we should “rather” think it is. Yet a goodly pile is it, and right pleasant to behold; and if anything could reconcile us to being an earl, 'twould be the occupancy of so pleasantly situated and so handsome an abode.

The hall door swings open in obedience to our knock – the moment we get inside, we discover by what agency. A janitor of staid aspect, an old man (apparently far from “eloquent”), attired quaintly after the fashion of a feudal age, has admitted us into a small but lofty hall. Spears and halberds are upon the walls; as if the stone-work had budded and put forth solid boughs, antlers branch out above us; and grim heads, with mouths which, in tongueless volubility, tell tales of scenes of the chase long gone by, are hung plentifully around. These having glanced at, we (by the porter's express desire) enrich his grace's visitors' book with our valuable autograph; and forthwith a huge inner gate, rampant with talbots of undaunted aspect, divides and opens to let us through. Heavens! What a magnificent vista is extended before our “dazēd vision”. Gallery after gallery is stretched out, in one straight line, to a prodigious length – “five hundred feet”, we are informed, and can readily believe – five hundred feet, upon which *stands* this “moving spectacle”.

The armoury itself, into which we first enter, is 120 feet long; adorned with bosses and rosettes, rich arches, sprung from corbels, support the oaken roof,

from which hang stately banners, and beneath which burgeon four-and-twenty brackets, whereupon figures of warriors “clad in complete steel” (or incomplete, as the case may be), and armed with lances, swords, and battle-axes, do firmly stand. Nor is here any lack of the most various weapons of war. This is said to be the largest private armoury in the kingdom: it contains suits of armour of divers ages, and from divers lands, and weapons of antique and of modern device. Therefore, this armoury, you perceive, is a decided curiosity; and doubtless, the sooner *all* armouries follow its example, and become *merely* that same, the better.

Under this portcullis at the end, and through this open screen of halberds and spears, march we forward, under the guidance of an urbane individual (one of the earl’s servants), and enter the picture gallery – a gallery ceiled with oak, the ceiling supported by light arches, the arches springing from corbels of talbots, the talbots holding emblazoned shields between their fore-paws. Pictures completely cover the sides of this gallery, of which pictures many, we are assured (if this be any recommendation), once belonged to the mother of Napoleon. Domenichino, Claude Lorraine, Murillo, Vandyck, Holbein, have their places (you perceive), amongst others, on the walls.

We pass through other rooms, each of which, had we time (and the man who conducts us, patience), we would fain spend at least half a day in. Already we have entirely forgotten the fairy land, the gardens of delight, the scenes of Arabian-nights’ felicity, a glimpse of which lately so enchanted us outside. What hours of study (that *should* be) lie wrapped up, as it were, folded closely and inaccessibly, in the vases and the urns, fastened to the statues and the busts, burnt in with the colours under the gorgeous windows, that are displayed around! Rich cabinets and clocks, pictures, and reliques, and medals, and statues, and enamels, and inlaid tables, and costly marbles, and “high embowered roof” – how they bewilder us! What casements, “high and triple arched”, cast streams of glory upon the costly furniture, and along these noiseless floors! Casements –

*All diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damasked wings;*

furniture,

Fit for the fair proud pressure of a queen;

and floors,

*Engarlanded and dispersed
With inwrought flowers, a cloth of gold.*

Mark, too, in the conservatory, what prosperous and splendid Phanerogamia; and birds, from far-off climes, profuse of their quaint notes, enrich still further the perfumed air. And now who shall deny that we are the inhabitants of this princely place? Is this the comedy of “Christophero Sly”, played o’er again?

For God’s sake, a pot of small ale!

Only that we are not quite so “vulgar”. At the building of this mansion, ‘tis true, we were not consulted; nevertheless, here we are, for the time being, its *real* occupants and owners. For he occupies who is within; and he owns who enjoys; and (a pound to a penny!) we, at the present moment, are enjoying the place ten times more than the earl and countess, and the earling or little earl, and the priest to boot, who formed an amused and an amusing group in one of the rooms which we have hastened through.

At last we retire from these courtly galleries and rich apartments; for time jogs on, and as yet we have seen nothing of the beauty which awaits us outside. “The gardens”, says our anonymous friend, “are one of the principal attractions at Alton Towers, and they are worthy of all admiration. For originality of design and beauty of combination, they are unrivalled in garden scenery. They occupy the sides of a valley which extends from the house to the church, and a small stream runs through them. They are connected with the grounds adjoining the mansion by a succession of shrubberies and plantations. It is almost impossible, from a description, to give any adequate idea of these wonderful gardens. Mr. Rhodes, author of Peak scenery [we had thought Peak scenery had a *different* Author!] says that ‘detail and description in such a scene are useless.’” Useless, ‘in such a scene’, no doubt, Mr. Rhodes; but how, when people are *out* of such a scene? Then, we apprehend, some faint notion at least might, with more or less pains, be usefully imparted; – at any rate, had we spent a day there, instead of less than an hour, we should (presumptuously, of course) be inclined to try. But our visit was little better than a race after our swiftly progressing guide. The impression left upon our minds is, therefore, one of confused delight – bewildered admiration. We carried away with us a heap of images, gloriously indistinct; a mingled mass of colours and forms; a composite reminiscence of retired and shady arbours, and marble temples, and fantastic pagodas, and stately porticoes, and curious walls, ivied and un-ivied, and spacious terraces, and stairs of deep and broad descent, and bridges, and multitudinous statues, and vases in wide profusion, and elaborate pavements, and long delightful gravel and grass walks, and rocks, and “mossy winding ways”; and trellis-work, railings, gates, seats, flower-baskets, cottages, moss-houses, shell-work, pools, streams, fountains, jets d’eau, waterfalls, parterres, trees, shrubs, and beds of flowers. A place to dream of, and to dream in; a spot for careless delight, and social festivity, and retired meditation; a fairy-land, joyful to be in, and delightful to remember.

Manchester Times, 3 August 1850

If the author had visited a quarter of a century previously, would he have been as scathing as John Loudon. Writing in his Encyclopaedia of Gardening he described the efforts of Charles, the sixteenth Earl of Shrewsbury as “*abounding in wealth, always fond of*

architecture and gardening, but with much more fancy than sound judgment". Charles had "consulted almost every artist, ourselves among the number, [but] he seems only to have done so for the purpose of avoiding whatever an artist might recommend ... ". Loudon was more impressed with Charles' successor, John, whose "...works, on the whole, are in a taste that will be more generally approved. In the gardens he has obliterated a

number of the walks, stairs, shell-works, and other petty contrivances; which, however, we almost regret, because no trifling alteration can ever improve what is so far out of the reach of reason."

You can read all of Loudon's comments about Alton Towers, and much more besides, in the Encyclopaedia by going to <http://books.google.co.uk/books>.

RHS Tatton Show Garden: the follow-on

King Canute – the photo

Knutsford Heritage Centre, having seen our show garden at RHS Tatton, said they would very much like to include a photograph of it in their calendar for 2013. We sent them a selection of images to choose from and the one they selected was this one taken by CGT member Gordon Spruce, who is a great supporter and helper for the Caldwell Nurseries Project. So, thank you Gordon and for anyone wishing to purchase a calendar it is available from the Knutsford Heritage Centre priced at £4.99. (Yes I know I should have got it in an earlier newsletter but better late than never)!

King Canute – the sculpture

For those of you who may be wondering where King Canute has gone – fear not he is safe and well and still on vacation - aka in storage.

His first proposed home fell through – not literally you understand (people in glass houses and all that) – but perhaps he was gazumped?

We have recently had a meeting with a very interested party and are now working out the practicalities and will keep you up-dated of any developments and/or date for his house warming party.

Christine Wilcox-Baker



Arley Garden Festival

2012

No doubt all CGT members visited this show and had a lovely time there (I'm afraid I didn't as I was on holiday) but did anyone by any chance take any photographs of the CGT flowerbed?

Masterminded by Ruth Brown, the bed told the tale of the Olympic rings and the Queen's diamond jubilee but unfortunately the one person we know of who took some photos managed to inadvertently delete them and so we have no record for our archives!

If you do have any I'd be very grateful if you could let me know and we can arrange to get some copies from you – either by e-mail if they are available as such or if you used that old-fashioned film stuff that we all knew and loved then I can always scan from some prints. Thank you.

Christine Wilcox-Baker

2013

And don't forget this year's photo competition with the theme *Friends and Foes in the Garden*. Now the weather is improving I'm sure you will all be outside snapping away. Whether it's the dog burying his bone; the grandchild pulling up your prize dahlias; the thrush demolishing a snail or the slug eating the lettuce – the list is endless – be there with your camera. e-mail your entries to Helen Robinson at helen.robinson@arleyhallandgardens.com or post them to CGT Photography Competition, Helen Robinson, Arley Hall, Arley, Northwich CW9 6NA. Tel: 01565 777353 ext. 31

Don't forget to include your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address, your age if you are under 16 and let us know when and where you took the photograph.

Jane Roberts will be running more Garden History Talks this year. These are an enjoyable way to absorb the intricacies of garden history.

You can choose from:

The Gardens and Plants of William Morris (Gawsworth Hall, 21 May. The cost of £35 includes tea and coffee but not lunch)

Gertrude Jekyll, Artist, Plantswoman and Garden Designer (Arley Hall, 13 June. The cost of £33 does not include tea, coffee or lunch, but these are available from the Tudor Barn Restaurant)

Roses: Their Importance in the History & Design of English Gardens (Kiftsgate Court, Gloucestershire, 25 June. Cost of £45 includes a light lunch)

The History, Design & Plants of English Flower Gardens: A series of 6 talks. These will be held weekly at both Gawsworth Hall (starting 3 September) and Arley Hall (starting 5 September) and cost just £65.

To book (places are limited) contact Jane Roberts on 01260 271186 or e-mail

botanical.surveys123@btinternet.com

Eaton Hall Gardens will be opening for charity on Sundays 26 May; 28 July and 25 August. Gates open at 10.30 a.m. (parking available from 10 a.m.) and close at 5 p.m. Entry is £6 for adults and £1.50 for children. Entrance via Eccleston/Aldford/Belgrave Gates. The charities being supported are Chester Childbirth Appeal; Motor Neurone Disease Association, Cheshire; Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research, Chester; and Three Villages Project.

Musical interlude

This year Benjamin Britten's music is being played around the globe to celebrate his centenary. The Britten – Pears Foundation have been undertaking the restoration of his home, the Red House in Aldeburgh, in readiness for opening later this year. Apparently Benjamin Britten rarely threw anything away so among his archive are lists of plants which are being used to recreate the gardens. If you are in Aldeburgh this summer you might like to take a look and report for the newsletter.

Paul Quigley, Ranger, will be giving a talk entitled 'The History of the Norton Priory Georgian Walled Garden – Secrets Revealed'. Date and time is 8 July, 7 p.m. Tickets are just £3, but places are limited so must be booked in advance. www.nortonpriory.org or tel: 01928 569 895

Combermere Abbey Gardens are re-opening after a 15-month closure for partial restoration. They are offering group visits (minimum 20, maximum 40) at a cost of £11 per person including refreshments. The guided tour will take the visitor through nearly nine centuries – from monastery to historic house, including the characters, personalities – and ghosts – who people its history. Tours can be morning or afternoon and can be booked any time in the year by prior arrangement.

For individuals, Abbey tours will be available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, until 23 May – adults £6, children under 16 £3.50 – but must be pre-booked. Contact Heather in the estate office on 01948 662880 or e-mail estate@combermereabbey.co.uk

If you missed the Spring Lecture, or would just like to know more about the gardens Lord and Lady Ashbrook visited last year, they all have amazing web-sites.

To find out more about P. Allen Smith (including his comments about Lord and Lady Ashbrook's visit, complete with photos of Arley: see his blog for March 2012) go to <http://www.pallensmith.com>. This website includes information about his garden, but much, much more

Copy date for July newsletter is 30 June

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the

Newsletter Editor, 26 Sandford Road, Sale, M33 2PS, tel: 0161 969 3300 or e-mail joy.uings@btconnect.com.