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Newsletter

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Foxhill Arboretum



On Saturday, 17th October 2010 a group of about 35 CGT members and their friends met outside the Foxhill Conference Centre at Frodsham in order to explore the Woodland Trails and Arboretum belonging to this wonderful complex.

For our guided tour the group was split into two and led off in opposite directions by Barbara Moth and Kath Gee to discover the secrets of Foxhill with its various woodland trails and spectacular views to Liverpool and the Clwydian Hills.

The countryside surrounding Foxhill is outstanding, set in a valley leading from Mouldsworth down to Frodsham with the sandstone escarpment rising behind the house.

Although there may have been a previous dwelling on the site known as the Woodlands, the present building was completed in 1870. The grand country house was planned by Reverend Richard Greenall, who had obtained the land with the apparent intentions of building a house in the mid-1860s following his

appointment as Archdeacon of Chester in September, 1866. The house is designed in the 'Italianate' style, which was prevalent in the 1850s and 1860s.

No information of who the architect was is known, although the construction seems to have been well underway when Richard Greenall died in 1867. In September 1868, the estate was conveyed to James Reynolds, a 43 year old hide leather merchant from Liverpool, who completed the house in 1870, renaming the Woodland estate to Foxhill Hall in 1874.

The property since then has seen a succession of owners until 1960, when Dr Lawrence and Norah Pilkington and their two daughters lived there till 1968. It was during their occupancy that much work was carried out in the woodland and the Arboretum. When their daughters married from Foxhill and left home, they decided to "downsize" and had a house built beside the walled garden known as "The Holt".

At that time Gerald Ellison, the Bishop of Chester, a close friend of the Pilkingtons had disclosed in conversations that he had an aspiration for a Diocesan Retreat and Conference Centre and was generously offered Foxhill for this purpose. In March, 1968 the house and estate became the Diocese's property, although Dr Pilkington still retained ownership and care of the woodlands and adjacent field.

So after 100 years as a private residence Foxhill and its immediate grounds are now the Chester Diocesan Retreat and Conference Centre.



Tackling the Woodland Trail

Very little is known about the design and layout of the grounds: one clue could relate to the architect employed by James Reynolds for the house. The type of brick used was a yellow glazed type mainly used in cities where it was easy to clean in the sooty atmospheres. This might indicate that the architect was more used to designing houses in urban areas, possibly Liverpool, where James Reynolds had his business. This could indicate that the grounds may have been designed by Edward Kemp (1817 -1891).

At this time Edward Kemp was, apart from being Superintendent at Birkenhead Park, designing gardens, parks and cemeteries mainly in Liverpool and the surrounding area and certainly worked at Castle Park House in Frodsham. It's a possibility – could it be?! – Research needed.

So what do we know – the house was completed in 1870, and from an early photograph the house is shown on a plateau with recently established shrubbery beds. Water was pumped by a ramp pump from a well situated near Foxhill Farm and stored in a large stone cistern above the house; this then fed a tank in the attic and taps in the garden.

An interesting feature in the woodlands is a cave where sandstone was cut for scouring the stone floors of the house or maybe the previous house. Near to the cave is the area due to quarrying, which has been developed into an ornamental Japanese style garden. It is not known whether it was Reynolds or Speakman, the next owner of the property, who was responsible for this work.

Onward and upwards; after a challenging walk to the woodland highpoint we came to another feature: the Folly. A substantially built square tower overlooking the head of the valley with distant views of Beeston, and the Clwyd Hills, the Wirral and the Liverpool area. A building of large dressed stone blocks, windows which in times past would have been fully glazed and an open door. Although it is now open to the sky it can be assumed that when newly built it would have had a substantial roof. What was its purpose: a retreat on a summer afternoon, to gaze at the distant world. Or maybe it was built just as a Folly.



In the north-east corner of the woods there could have been a large pond; quite a lot stone wall in the area would indicate that it used to be quite a feature. Indeed Dr Pilkington thought it was a marl pit (marl being a rich soil, often used as an ameliorant) and that, when the pit was worked out and the lining washed away over the years the water would have drained away.

Prior to Dr Pilkington, the owner of the estate was Christopher Rosnett, (who was at Foxhill from 1945-1950) – a keen gardener, known to be particularly fond of orchards, who planted the daffodils on the bank below the house, originally in the shape of a spoked wheel. They are said to have had four gardeners and installed the curved seat in the alcove by the croquet lawn (formerly the tennis court), specially made by the joinery department at the tannery company.

It is probable that what is now known as the croquet lawn was laid out during the 1920/30s as a lawn tennis court; they say the holes for the net posts are still in place.

The car park by the house used to be grass and rose beds with an ornamental sundial on a pillar.

Dr Lawrence Pilkington started to restore the woodlands and the arboretum was opened in May, 1994 following the work of Head Warden, Bob Gilhom and assistants in clearing and replanting the rare and interesting trees.

A maze and a water garden were planted and Olga Mudie, a Friend of Foxhill planted shrubs outside the link passage and contributed many other plants for the gardens. Sadly, some we had difficulty in naming.

However, the main interest in the Woodlands and the Arboretum are the trees, some standing like centurions in open ground but many hiding and appearing like strangers in the dense undergrowth of the Woodland.

Our thanks must go Maria Luczak and Barbara Moth for their painstaking work in identifying so many of the species (see the list sent with the visit notes) – there are still a few shrubs and trees to be identified – help still required! (See photo – any ideas?)



Even if at present further restoration work in the woodland is on hold due to funding or work teams, we should at least record what is there; maybe this could be a special project for a college?

A personal pleasure was seeing half-hidden in the woodland a “Mulberry” more likely the Black Mulberry (*Morus nigra*), which can live to a great age and not the White Mulberry (*Morus alba*) which is useless apart for feeding silkworms. This tree is a reminder of our home town (Macclesfield) well known for its silk trade.

Personal Reflections on the Visit

It would be great if the gardens and woodland of this fine Victorian Estate could be cleared and restored to represent their past owners vision, aspiration, pride and power, but I am sure the church today with their limited funds, should concentrate on the main issues of the day.

Could the ruins of the hilltop Folly be telling us deep down, that for the moment we must look ahead to today's challenges and leave the Victorian restorations for consideration by future generations?

I am sure everyone who came on the trip to Foxhill will have taken some wonderful memories of the visit – the Japanese garden, the views from the Folly at the highest point in the Arboretum, the unusual numbers of trees not seen before, the autumn tints beginning to appear and the feeling of peace and tranquillity and that the area had returned to its natural state.

Our sincere thanks to Barbara and her team for arranging such an enjoyable visit and for all the information she had given to us prior to the event in order to “whet our appetite” for what we were going to see on the day.

Our grateful thanks too, to all the staff at Foxhill who welcomed us and served us Afternoon Tea, very much appreciated.

All in all, a very special occasion and enjoyed by everyone who attended.

Gordon Darlington

‘A Veritable Eden’ The Manchester Botanic Garden, by CGT member Ann Brooks will be published in March. Ann will be at the Portico Library on Thursday 24th March from 6.00 to 8.00 p.m. for the launch and book-signing.



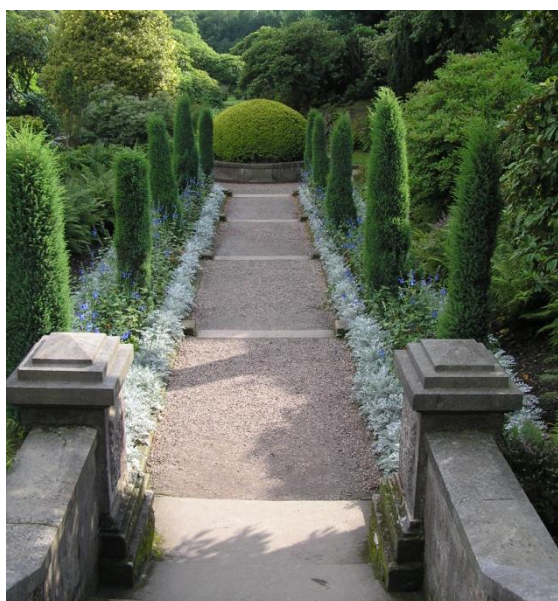
Visit to Biddulph Grange

Saturday 14th August 2010

The first part of our tour satisfied all my expectations of an elaborate mid-19th century garden.

The Italianate mansion stands high on its platform of crisp, architectural stonework in the supremely confident attitude of the times. A leisurely life-style and plentiful comforts are catered for on long, wide terraces bursting with colour and perfume – sweet peas, roses, Cambridge-blue salvias, bright annuals, and the then curious and rare monkey-puzzle trees, used as the centre-pieces of four square beds.

All geometry, order and logic. Even the wildly exotic Mexican dahlias, with their jazzy colours and petals arranged like the skirts of a Spanish dancer are firmly contained in a corset of sober, buttressed hedges of yew. All very proper: good repetition, strong patterns.



But to a man of great horticultural appetite and ambition, the possibilities within this structure had come to an end.

James Bateman's scholarly and pioneering study *Orchidaceae of Mexico and Guatemala* published in 1837 earned him election to the Horticultural Society. At his family's home Knypersley Hall, Staffordshire, he had already created some notable rockwork – 'the mantle of Sir U. Price seems to have fallen on his shoulders ... when he copies, it is from the highest school of all – Nature'.

Among his colleagues were directors of the recently-formed Royal Botanic Garden, Kew, and an artist E.W. Cooke; he came to visit James and his wife Maria at their new home, Biddulph Grange, in 1849. Their combined ideas set in motion a massive garden building programme, which saw the completion of the major features by the mid-1850s.

The great spur to their ambitious scheme was a knowledge of the many hundreds of plants pouring into England from the four corners of the world,

gathered by ship's captains and doctors, by missionaries and traders, and increasingly by specialist collectors. Expeditions were being commissioned by nurseries such as Veitch and Loddiges – Cooke was married to Loddiges' daughter to give added spice to the mix.

How to display a plethora of evergreen coniferous trees in the existing garden styles? How to assemble the growing number of shrubs bearing flower, foliage and berry in seemingly clashing colours? How to grow successfully the harvest of species from habitats as diverse as cool, moist valleys and warm, dry hillsides? At Elvaston, Derby, William Barron arranged the new pines, cypresses and firs with English holly and yew to form a vast array of clipped shapes in Elizabethan Revivalist style. At Trentham, Staffordshire, George Fleming turned 12 acres into an arboretum where he mingled exotic with native trees, the deciduous and coniferous being placed in contrasting groups. Shrubs followed natural contours in the best Picturesque style, but against this 'natural' scene, Fleming juxtaposed some artifice, making girdles and clearings of the most perfect turf.

Did Bateman read the glowing reports of these experiments in the 'Gardener's Chronicle'? Did he say to himself 'There is a better way'? Innovation was in the family; a plan of Arley Hall, Cheshire, shows the double herbaceous borders as early as 1846, long before that feature became popular, and Viscountess Ashbrook was Maria's sister. Imagine the conversation over dinner: 'Where will you put your new plantain lilies and peonies?'; 'Well, dear, they're from China'.

Already new planting ideas were in the air; Repton's American garden was his solution to grouping the peat-loving tribe, and the winter garden was heralded as a solution to the grouping of new conifers.

But the mixing of exotics with native species was a stern challenge to the designer, for it demanded a confident handling of artifice versus nature. Bateman solved these problems with his inspired combination of many habitats.

A pond bordered by iris, gunnera and Himalayan rhododendrons seems commonplace to us now, but at Biddulph the placement of this 'wild' feature just beneath the balustraded terrace must have seemed shocking. The Victorian visitors looking for their favourite ferns would expect to find them neatly arranged by a wall amongst shells and crystalline stones; instead Bateman transported them through a dark tunnel into a miniature 'Scottish' glen, its chunks of Hollington sandstone arranged correctly in strata and dripping gloomily. Echoes of Hawkstone?

The Treaty of Nanking opened the ports of China to western traders in 1842, and enthusiastic botanists rushed to explore this Shangri La of plant-life.

Sir Joseph Hooker and Robert Fortune were early collectors and their books reached avid garden owners. At Biddulph an enclosed area was devoted to newly-arriving plants from China, chiefly in weeping, spiral and fastigate forms. Cooke designed the red lacquer bridge, pagoda and temple, whilst the Chinese bull and dragons were sculpted by Waterhouse Hawkins, creator of the huge animals in the Great Exhibition, 1851.

The respected garden designer Edward Kemp, superintendent of Birkenhead Park, wrote in 1856: 'Mr Bateman has aptly imitated the curious features of the old willow-pattern dinner plate in a marvellously small area'. He called it one of those eccentric and grotesque efforts of gardening art in which the Chinese are said to indulge, using miniature models of mountains, lakes and bridges, the whole finished with stunted and crippled trees. On a sunny autumn day however the golden bull shone benignly and the golden larch glowed softly over the water.



The discovery of Egypt causes sheer amazement. The solid walls of yew usher you towards the yawning entrance of the stone pyramid, guarded by its pair of huge sphynxes. The spotlighted idol inside is positively threatening, and I escaped into the open with relief.

There is no attempt at horticulture here, just brooding antiquity and the creepy thought of Cleopatra's poisonous asp. I was glad to leave the intensity, the claustrophobia of these places.

I have a soft spot for avenues; the feeling of being hugged by tall trees is special. The pinetum is a long, curving walk modelled on that at Chatsworth, and for Kemp 'doubtless the only true idea of a pinetum'.

The trees were planted on mounds 'bringing the beautiful forms ... between the spectator and the sky without any intervening background'. Some clearance is needed to achieve this again, but the high branches against a clear sky still make wonderful patterns, and impress, like the fan vaults of a gothic cathedral.

The multi-layered avenue, added after 1856, is long and straight, and displays wellingtonias and deodar cedars in all their majesty.



By setting the trees on mounds we can appreciate the roots too

Bateman followed the example of Elvaston by grouping evergreens in an ordered fashion, but took the leap and added deciduous subjects to them, placing briar roses, crimson-flowered horse-chestnuts, then dark Austrian pines on banks behind them. His play with colours echoed Fleming's at Trentham.

How was it possible to assemble so many diverse and discrete sections without offending the eye with a horticultural cacophany? Was it like modern town-planning – every style imaginable jostling side-by-side? The very clever solution, highly praised by Kemp, was an astonishing array of divisions:

'ornamental walls, or walls covered with ivy and other climbers, yew, holly and beech hedges, covered ways or corridors of wood or stone, irregular or formal archways, tunnels or cavern-like passages, mounds of earth, rockeries, masses of roots and trunks of trees, with larger or smaller groups of shrubs, are some of the means by which these changes are brought about'.

He summed up the immense tour-de-force of Bateman and Cooke as 'a very high achievement of art'. 'The great and true secret of the design is the preparation of a suitable home for nearly all the hardy members of the great plant family, which the curiosity of man has discovered or cultivated'.

The importance of this new way of arranging plants cannot be over-estimated.

As more and more foreign species flooded into England, nurserymen got to work on producing hybrids with reliable hardiness and better blooms; the word *hybrid* signified the child of a Roman father and a foreign mother, and in 1845 was first used to mean a cross-bred plant.

Not until William Robinson's book *The Wild Garden* in 1860 was there any plausible advice on incorporating exotic with native plants. Designers following in Bateman and Robinson's footsteps continued to explore the many ways of grouping plants by habitat, and the successors became the naturalistic rock garden, and the themed areas for Japanese, Mediterranean and meadow plants.

As a cultured person, Bateman would have studied the Roman Empire, and the attributes of the Emperor Hadrian (b.76 AD) must have inspired him. It is thought that the 100 acres of buildings and gardens at his villa near Tivoli were designed by the Emperor himself, an accomplished architect. A recurring theme was the allusion made to provinces of the Empire; echoes of Greece and Egypt are particularly strong, and the long canal named Canopus and lined with columns and statues takes its name and form from a canal joining Alexandria with Canopus.

Another underlying theme, however, interprets Bateman's strong religious beliefs. The original entrance to the garden for the public was through a Geological Gallery, in corridor form, and lit by skylights. Seven bays portrayed the biblical story of Creation, and Bateman, a keen amateur geologist, assembled rocks, fossils and specimens from the oldest period to the youngest. He was President of the Staffordshire Field Society and the family's wealth came from coal mines (he was born in Bury, Lancashire) and this interest, together with his devout Christian beliefs, came together to give a unique explanation for his choice of planting. The National Trust has completed repairs to the floor, made of Minton tiles, and aims to gradually re-instate the gallery.



The garden's international significance is deservedly reflected in its award of English Heritage Grade I.

Elaine Taylor

Knypersley Hall

Biddulph Grange and Knypersley Hall were originally owned by James Bateman's father.

In May 1844 The British Florist, or Lady's Journal of Horticulture, reported on a visit to Knypersley.

The report focused on orchids. The area around Manchester was famous for the number of people engaged on growing these to perfection. One such was James Bateman. The report ends with a list of seventy-two orchidaceous plants in flower at the time of the visit.

To ensure the health of his orchids, Bateman had a range of glasshouses kept at different temperatures.

The greenhouse was at 45°; the vinery (which included two banana plants setting fruit) was at 60°.

Next to this was a house devoted to South American plants. This had a floor set three feet below ground level and was kept at a humid 65°.

Then there was a large double-glazed house for Indian orchids where the temperature was between 75° and 80°. But it was noted that the expense of the double-glazing was not really worth the cost, if one had a good heating system.

The gardens were on the southern slope of a gentle hill, with "*delightfully romantic and varied views among the surrounding hills and woods*".

In addition to the orchid houses, there was a flower-garden with rockwork made of stones "*of several tons weight each*", where rhododendrons and other American plants were growing.

A narrow path was edged with ferns and led to "*a sort of sarcophagus or cave, containing stone coffins from Pompeii and other Roman antiquities*."

There were also a rosary, a pinetum, a lake with a bridge and a tower.

I was particularly interested to note that in the pinetum were "*young plants of auracaria*".

I was told that the baby araucarias in the parterre at the entrance to the gardens at Biddulph had been planted in this unsuitable situation because no-one knew what size they would eventually become.

This is untrue – there was plenty of information available, well before this date, which gave the ultimate height of these trees as 150 ft. However, they **were** known to be slow-growing. Loudon in Arboretum et fruticium reported that a 40 year-old specimen at Kew was just 12 ft tall.

For those with access to the internet, read the full report of Knypersley at <http://books.google.co.uk> and search for The British Florist. Volumes 5-6 are available on full view.

Joy Uings

Mrs Delany (1700-1778):

a lecture by John Edmondson at the Nantwich Museum

Some of you may have been fortunate enough to have seen the Mrs Delany exhibition organised by the Yale Center for British Art and Sir John Soane's Museum earlier this year.

Her amazing collection of more than a thousand paper collages of flower portraits is housed in the British Museum.

John Edmondson, a taxonomic botanist and formerly curator at Liverpool Museum gave a beautifully illustrated account of her work with especial reference to the plant hunting context and the illustrious society in which she moved.

Well known for her embroidery, shell work and landscape drawings Mrs Delany embarked on her floral art at the remarkable age of 72 in 1773.

Twenty years prior to that Carl Linnaeus developed his system of plant nomenclature and Mrs Delany used the Linnaean name as well as the common name in her plant studies.

She recorded the source of where she obtained the plant on the back of each collage. Chelsea Physic Garden, for example, under the curatorship of Philip Miller of "The Gardener's Dictionary" fame, supplied her with "*Philadelphus aromaticus*" (now *Leptospermum scoparium*).

John outlined world voyages of discovery and their plant collectors and explorers: James Cook and Joseph Banks to New Zealand, Hawaii and the South Pacific, Botany Bay in Australia and others to Japan and the Far East.

Mrs Delany was well-known to many of them. She drew the Bird of Paradise plant introduced by the English Collector Francis Masson, spice plants provided by the North American Collector John Barton and Dr John Fothergill also supplied her with plants.

She, too, was generous in giving her collages as gifts to her friends many of whom moved in influential Royal and aristocratic circles.

She enjoyed the patronage of Margaret Cavendish Bentinck, Duchess of Portland, who grew exotic plants such as *Portlandia grandiflora* from the West Indies. They both worked closely with the famous botanical artist and teacher G.D. Ehret who was working in London spreading the word about the Linnaean system.

John pointed to Northern connections to Mrs Delany: the dried plant specimens at the Herbarium in Liverpool, the voucher specimens at Liverpool Museum, the Earl of Derby's art collection and the less accomplished collection of Booth Grey collages, not at Dunham Massey but now at Yale.

What a delightful way to spending a Saturday morning discovering Mrs Delany's exquisitely rendered flower portraits of such sensitivity, each flower enhanced by a dark background and meticulously catalogued. John showed a conversation piece of Mrs Delany in the centre of things at court with Queen Charlotte. How I would have liked to have been a fly on the wall to capture the spirit, wit and humour of this unusual lady who had channelled her energies in widowhood into such a wonderful botanical legacy.

Gaye Smith

There are two excellent books on Mrs Delany:

Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Robert: Mrs Delany and her circle. Yale University Press, 2009, to accompany the exhibition at Yale and at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Ruth Hayden: Mrs Delany, her life, her flowers. British Museum Press, 1980. Reprinted 2005. The 1992 edition appeared under the title Mrs Delany and her flower collages.



Portlandia grandiflora, Ref:
1897.0505.692

(courtesy of the British Museum).



Parnassia palustris, Ref:
1897.0505.650

(courtesy of the British Museum)



Aesculus hippocastanum, Horse
Chestnut, Ref.: 1897,0505.7

(courtesy of the British Museum).

Down on the farm: aspects on the history of Cheshire's agriculture

This was the theme of Cheshire Local History Association's annual history day held on 30th October 2010 at Northwich Memorial Hall. Lectures were given to a packed house by different speakers and the various stands, including the display by Cheshire Gardens Trust, attracted a lot of interest.

Below is a summary of the lectures by various CGT members who attended.

The Cheshire Local History Day always produces some very interesting factual information. In this instance it came in the talk entitled **Grain and Cereal Crops in 14th Century Cheshire** by P. H. W. Booth of the University of Liverpool.

The general belief is that Cheshire is a pastoral county with dairying as its main farming enterprise throughout the centuries. The soil is poor and predominantly clay which is difficult to work, so that grass (and therefore cows) is the only possible crop.

However Dr Booth has established that this is simply not the whole story and that arable farming has a more important place in the economy of Cheshire country life than previously recognised.

From his study of the 1308/9 Corn Account of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield's Manor in Tarvin in Cheshire, he could calculate the overall quantities of arable crops grown.

Oats, the main crop, were used as fodder for the oxen (used for ploughing), the horses, cart horses and draught horses, the pigs and piglets, the calves, the oxen for fattening and the ewes and lambs.

The threshers were paid for their work in oats and the balance was sold. Wheat was grown for bread-making; barley was grown for beer-making. Peas and beans were also grown but not recorded.

Other facts emerged from this interesting talk. Ridges and furrows were of different widths at different times through the ages. The Cheshire acre differs from the statutory acre. The ancient Cheshire bushel was larger than the standard London bushel; both were in use in the 14th century.

Dr Booth could ably demonstrate that cattle did not dominate the county; instead arable farming was of great importance in the economy of early Cheshire.

Freyda Taylor

Cheshire cheese and farming in the 17th and 18th centuries. Charles Foster

Before 1650 cheese production was not a major consideration for Cheshire farmers. Traditionally, most farmers grew corn, hemp and flax, but produced only sufficient butter and cheese for family use during the winter. Any surplus cheese was probably sold at local fairs or markets.

At Arley Hall, for example, although the estate covered over 12,000 acres only 500-1,500 acres were actually farmed by Peter Warburton, the landowner, and the main purpose of the dairy herd of thirty-five cows was to supply the Hall with milk, butter and meat.

In the sixteenth century Cheshire cheeses were highly regarded in other parts of the country, a reputation based not only on word of mouth but also on the gentry taking or sending cheeses to London.

However, it is unlikely that much cheese was sent in this way because the cost of transport by land was very high. Furthermore, the Port Books for the years before 1650 show that very little cheese reached London by ship, even though sea freight was much cheaper.

Until the middle of the seventeenth century most of London's dairy produce had come from Suffolk but in the late 1640s the area had been affected by severe flooding and there had been a major outbreak of cattle disease.

Consequently the cost of Suffolk cheese rose and London began to buy 'full milk' cheese from Cheshire (and other areas of the North West).

Originally, Suffolk had also produced full milk cheese, but in the early seventeenth century London's demand for butter increased. As a result, the farmers had started to skim off the cream, so reducing the quality of the cheese.

Although the London cheesemongers were doubtful about the marketability of Cheshire cheese (a better quality product but more expensive), from 1652 onwards there was an increase in shipping.

The turning point had been the arrival of the 'James' in London in 1650 with twenty tons of cheese on board. Sales increased considerably, with the Port Books of Chester showing that 364 tons of cheese was sent to London in 1664.

In the 1650s and 1660s all the ships had sailed from Chester, but in about 1670 a new wharf and a special warehouse were built in the Warburton's manor of Sutton Weaver (Frodsham). This was on the Mersey Estuary and so within the Port of Liverpool. Trade quickly increased, making Liverpool at least as important as Chester in the cheese trade.

However, in 1689 the long war with France began and French privateers were so active that the maritime trade in cheese dwindled, ceasing altogether in about 1700. During this period cheese had to be transported to London by land. This mode of transport increased the cost and appears to have reduced demand.

The organisation of the market altered dramatically. Farmers began to make their own deals with the waggoners to take their cheese to the retail cheesemongers in London, no longer dealing with the wholesalers and their factors.

By 1713 the war had ended and the shipment of cheese re-commenced. By 1729 the market had more than doubled in size.

Dairy farming to produce cheese for the London market was different from traditional farming. Commercial cheese production started on large farms which already had dairy herds. To respond to the increased demand for cheese more cows were needed. Farms became larger and the switch was made from meat to cheese production.

With the increase in the size of dairy herds (estimated at about 20,000 cows between 1650 and 1688 in the North West), it was necessary to find ways to produce sufficient hay to feed the cattle throughout the winter, to increase the quality of the pastures so that more cows could be fed and to improve the health and well-being of the herds during the winter so that the milk yield would be greater the following summer. Consequently, on these farms hemp and flax production dwindled and only sufficient corn for family use was grown.

In the seventeenth century cheese was made in round moulds 12" – 19" in diameter and 1½" – 3" thick. However, by 1720 Cheshire had developed larger cheeses that were 5" – 8" thick.

Thin cheese dried out quickly and became hard, but a thick cheese ripened with a rich, moist, mellow interior and therefore sold at a higher price.

This increase in thickness probably led to the development of heavier presses to ensure that all the whey was drained from the cheese. Similarly, it may also have been the origin of skewering the cheese to ensure that the whey was not retained in the interior, a practice which appears to have been peculiar to Cheshire.

Ruth Brown

[Signing herself "a true Cestrian", Ruth added a footnote: "*Traditionally produced Cheshire farm cheese is the best cheese in the world*". Reading the above, I certainly want to go out and buy some! Ed.]

The Life and Work of a Victorian Farmer's Wife. Ruth Goodman

Having watched, and enjoyed, the Victorian Farm series on television I had been looking forward to hearing Ruth Goodman's talk about the life and work of the Victorian Farmer's wife.

However I felt that her talk had very little about the role of a farmer's wife other than to say that it was commonly believed, by both sexes, that outdoor work coarsened and roughened women (rather bad news for us lady gardeners!!).

Ruth began by outlining the importance of 'dung' in the Victorian economy. It was collected and stored in a midden, usually situated in the middle of the farmyard, where it was matured before being spread on the land to raise production. In the 1860s five times more food was being produced than a hundred years earlier. Crops such as turnips were used to feed livestock in the winter.



The Victorian age was one of great change. Farming technology went from the hand sickle to the reaper and from the flail to the threshing box. This meant that the work available became more seasonal with little work undertaken in the winter months. Agricultural workers in the north fared better than their southern counterparts due to alternative labour sources, for example, in mills. Men worked the land and women tended the home and dairy.



The introduction of the railways changed the face of agriculture again with fresh produce able to reach towns and cities quickly. In the 1880s there were 400 more stations than there are today often in small rural communities. Dairy herds built up in Cheshire with the national demand for fresh milk and cheese.

Ruth used to live in Cheshire and developed a passion for 16th and 17th century history. Her first TV appearance was in *Tales from the Green Valley*, in which she had to learn to handle various farm animals. The cows were her favourites and although scared of their size to begin with she said that she soon bonded with them whilst milking!

I'm afraid I found Ruth's talk rather disjointed. She was led by questions from the floor rather than a prepared lecture and it was a shame that she had no visual aids or slides which may have helped detract from her rather 'over the top' style of presentation!

My sister and I visited Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, where the Victorian Farm series was filmed, a few years ago and spent a delightful day exploring the farm, schoolroom and garden. (see photos above).

The vegetable garden was especially interesting and I can highly recommend it as a 'grand day out'!

Chris Talbot

Cheshire agriculture: 1945 to the present.

Doug Haynes

Doug Haynes began his talk by outlining the agricultural situation in Cheshire before 1945.

The period from the 1840s to 1875 was the golden age of agriculture. Industrialisation and the coming of the railways brought massive financial investment and a wider market for agricultural goods in nearby towns.

This improvement was short-lived and agriculture went into a recession for a long time with intermittent spells of improvement such as the small-holdings set up for soldiers and sailors returning from the front after World War 1 and the Milk Marketing Board. This was set up in 1933 to control milk production and distribution guaranteeing farmers a minimum price for their milk. It was disbanded in 1994 with de-regulation of the British milk market.

By World War 2 agriculture had not changed very much and mechanisation was slow. Some farms did not have electricity. Tractors were gradually being introduced but some tenanted farms were still using horses. The binder, invented in 1872, was still in use and the threshing machines used by contractors were powered by steam engines. Horse drawn mowers were gradually replaced by tractors.

The main breeds of cattle in Cheshire in 1939 were the Dairy Shorthorn, Ayrshire, British Friesian and Red Poll. Guernsey and Jersey breeds were also kept for their high quality milk which had a higher fat content for cream and butter.

Yield was about 500 gallons per cow per year. The cows were hand-milked with one person needed to milk 10 cows. Milking machines were gradually introduced using a vacuum pump powered by a petrol engine. Very few fertilisers and pesticides were used.

Post 1945

National policies had an important effect on farming. At the end of World War 2 the UK needed to maximise food production particularly as food rationing did not end until 1953.

To achieve this the 1947 and 1957 Agriculture Acts were passed which guaranteed fixed prices for main crops and minimum prices for fatstock, milk and eggs irrespective of the market value. As the result of stable prices and guarantees, farm incomes rose. Farmers were able to make capital investments and utilise the latest technology. Buildings were more modern and often built of concrete and steel. Mechanisation increased particularly for arable crops with the introduction of the combine harvester. Crop yields improved due to higher yielding varieties and more widespread use of herbicides and fertilisers.

The establishment of a national dairy herd that was tuberculin-free changed much of Cheshire dairy farming. Cheshire was the last county to have disease-free herds, Scotland being the first. The shorthorn dairy breeds were superseded by Ayrshires, Friesians then Holstein Friesians which account for 90% of today's dairy herds.

Artificial insemination, introduced in 1950s through the Milk Marketing Board, had a great impact. Milk yields increased from an average 2,500 per cow per year in 1945 to 8,215 litres per cow in 2003. Since the 1980s further developments are embryo implants to improve breeding stock.

Although milk yields have increased, cheese production in Cheshire has declined, with 2,000 farms making cheese in 1914 dropping to approximately 12 in 1972 and 1-2 in 2010.

Changes have also occurred in the beef cattle industry with the introduction of the larger continental breeds such as Charolais, Limousin, Simmenthal which are often crossed with British breeds such as Hereford, Beef Shorthorn but need more food concentrate. The Hereford and Aberdeen Angus are the UK's best breeds as the cattle will fatten from grass and do not need the higher food concentrates of the imported breeds.

Disease epidemics have had a devastating effect on Cheshire agriculture with farmers incurring substantial losses. Outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease in 1960-61, 1967-68 and 2001 decimated dairy herds. In 1968 in particular 400,000 animals, comprising 30% of Cheshire's herd, were destroyed. More cattle were bought in to replace stock.

Other diseases have affected production. Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) identified from 1986 onwards and the human form of Creutzfeldt Jakobs Disease (vCJD) in 1995. From 1996 all cattle over 30 months had to be slaughtered to prevent the disease entering the food chain. This period has been increased to 48 months.

Future developments in the dairy industry are likely to be robotic milking parlours with cows choosing when they want to be milked. The prices of dairy cattle at auction are a deterrent to investment however. A herd of 90 dairy cattle fetched an average of £1,700 at Beeston auction last year.

Doug also mentioned the state of other industries. In the poultry industry the trend is away from keeping hens in batteries towards rearing them in deep litter in barns and free range. Free range eggs account for 34% of the volume of egg production but 50% of the value. The pig industry is not profitable with the national herd reduced by 50% in 2009. Changes have also occurred in arable crop production with over 400,000 acres of oil seed rape grown in Cheshire. More maize is now grown for cattle feed. Hedges have been removed to enable the use of machinery but this has mostly occurred in East Anglia.

Future developments in agriculture lie with the increasing technological development of farm machinery such as potato spinners to spin potatoes out of the drill and hay balers. Some are highly sophisticated multi-function machines costing £380,000 use satellite technology.

Heather Turner

CGT is a corporate member of Cheshire Local History Association. Visit www.cheshirehistory.org.uk for more information about the Association and details of your local history group meetings.

The 2011 History Day will be on 29th October and the subject will be Building Cheshire: Centenary of John Douglas

Agriculture v Horticulture

Where does gardening end and farming begin? As a committed town-dweller, it's a question that's been exercising my little grey cells over the past couple of years.

Charles Foster's talk on cheese transmogrifying from food created for family use to an economically viable product for the London markets provided an insight into 19th century homes around Manchester.

Today, agriculture and gardening seem to be such completely separate areas of occupation. What does the suburban garden have in common with acres of rapeseed or herds of cows? Yet in the 1830s, adverts in the Manchester Times for houses to let included details of shippens and dairies along with the usual gardens and orchards.

In the eighteenth century books often covered both farming and gardening. Stephen Switzer's Ichnographia Rustica (1718) contained directions for gardens, parks, paddocks and a general system of agriculture.

In 1733 The Practical Husbandman and Planter covered fields, woods, apiary, orchard, fruit garden, kitchen garden, the parterre, distillery and garden, plus "*all other branches of husbandry and planting*". At the end of the century, Erasmus Darwin's book Phytologia was on the philosophy of both agriculture and gardening.

Not really surprising for a period where the economy was still based on agriculture and transport was slow.

Anyone with a country estate would expect to have their own kitchen garden and orchard as well as flower garden and pleasure grounds. Plantations of trees were not just aesthetically pleasing, but were planted for future profit. Large estates would include the home farm and other farms let out to tenant farmers.

John Loudon's first publication was the two-volume A Treatise on Country Residences published in 1806, when he was just 23. With his background in farming, he included a section on agriculture. At a time when previously uncultivated land was being brought into use for both farming and gardening, information on drainage, soil, manures, etc. was applicable to each.

As industrialists became wealthier, they wanted their 'house in the country' in addition to that in town. But, since walking was often the best method for getting to the office, it was the country within walking distance that was preferred.

For Manchester that meant Ardwick, Chorlton Row and Hulme. Later, it meant Broughton and Cheetham.

In August 1836, a house in Sale was available with "*stables, coach-house, shippen, barn; and other outbuildings, with a considerable garden and large and well-stocked orchard*". The mention of stables is a reminder that horses were essential for travel if walking was out of the question. To keep a horse meant having pasture for grazing and harvesting a hay crop for the winter.

Soon, gardens in the immediate suburbs became 'development opportunities'. Large properties were broken up. In April 1839, Thomas Bibby's estate in Levenshulme (about 45 acres) was up for auction. It had been split into 15 separate lots, defined by a number of proposed roads.

In June 1850 an advert appeared addressed "*to families wishing to live in the country*". The property was only a few miles from Manchester, but in addition to the house, it offered: "*stable, gig-house, thrashing-barn, piggeries, &c &c. with two acres of garden land, orchard, &c.*"

The period of the country house in these suburbs was fairly short-lived however, as the town continued to grow and push ever outwards.

The coming of the railways (around 1850) reduced reliance on horses and made it easier to move further out of town. Demand for land was high. Farms and gardens close to the town all gave way to housing for the less wealthy. Town-dwellers became more cut off from the countryside and today's gardens have no need to provide for animals as well as humans.

Agriculture and gardening were united for another generation, though. The Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette combined both areas of activity from 1844 until 1873. The Gardeners' and Farmers' Journal began in 1847; its first issue stated that profits were to be distributed for the "*relief of aged and indigent gardeners and farm bailiffs, their widows and orphans*".

The Scottish Farmer and Horticulturist ran for four years from 1861-1865, before becoming simply Farmer. The Agricultural and Horticultural Co-operative Association published the Agricultural Economist and Horticultural Review in 1870.

Today they may be separate activities, but in their history, gardening and agriculture are entwined.

Joy Uings

Did you get given a book as a Christmas present?

Was it so good you want to share it with others? Or so bad you want to warn others not to buy it?

Why not write a brief review for the April newsletter. Send to the editor (details on last page).

Garden visitors: check out www.cheshiregardens.com for details of events at all your favourite gardens.

Garden makers: Sue Beesley (Bluebell Cottage Gardens/Lodge Lane Nursery) is looking for help with her garden for Tatton RHS Flower Show. Tel: 01928 713718.

Caldwell Nurseries Project – not dead yet! News update

Following our disappointing lack of success with initial funding applications, the project steering group met, and then we met with officers at the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to receive feedback.

The meeting was very positive. HLF thought it a good project but had concerns about lack of secured match funding, long term sustainability of the website and educational outreach, which together with intense competition from other submissions, meant that the application failed to get through. They encouraged re submission, though this cannot be for an identical project, and of course there is no guarantee of success.

We have undertaken further investigation of funding sources and, in partnership with Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, have submitted an application to the Getty Foundation for the cost of transcribing the business ledgers and making them accessible via a website. We wait to hear.

Our greatest concern has been the oral history element of the project and the danger of losing important elements of this with the passage of time. The Council of Management has taken the brave decision to fund Oral History training from CGT fund, so that with trained volunteers we can begin to make recordings of the Caldwell family, staff and customers, several of whom have already been in contact.

We hope to arrange this training for March 2011. This will coincide with an exhibition at Knutsford Heritage Centre in March about local gardens

featuring Caldwell's Nurseries and providing more publicity for the project. The exhibition will also include a selection of historic garden artefacts compiled by our own member Ruth Brown, seen here in her Caldwell apron complete with Canute logo!



We are immensely grateful for all the encouragement and support that we have received; everyone seems to think that it is a great project.

If you have previously expressed an interest in oral history, we will be in touch with you; or if you feel that this is something that could be of interest and you would like to find out what it will involve, please get in touch with Barbara Moth 01606 46228 or barbara.moth@btinternet.com.

Stop Press: We have now heard that the application to the Getty Foundation has been unsuccessful.

Do any of our members work, or have they worked, for employers operating grant schemes? If so we would like to hear from you. **Shell** and **Barclays** are two companies who have given grants to support their employees (or former employees) charities.

Knutsford Heritage Centre Exhibition – Historic Gardens around Knutsford - 1 March -2 April

This exhibition will include a panel about Caldwell's Nurseries. There are to be talks– 'Cuttings for a gardener's diary' – Sam Youd, (Mon. 7 March 7.30pm), and 'The History of Arley Gardens' – Gordon Baillie (Tues 15 March 7.30pm), both at £10 to include refreshments and to be held at the Heritage Centre. For further details and tickets contact Knutsford Heritage Centre. Tel: 01565 650506 or www.knutsfordheritage.co.uk

Conservation and Planning Coordinator

After several years in post, Barbara Moth has decided to step down from this role at the AGM (and to focus on Research and Recording and the Caldwell's Nurseries Project). Barbara feels that it is time to let someone else bring fresh thoughts to Conservation and Planning. She is very grateful for all the support she has had in this role; without member's contributions the Trust would have been unable to input to national and local consultations, and to comment on and influence local planning decisions. She will continue to help contribute to individual consultations and responses to planning applications.

Barbara would be pleased to discuss this role with anyone who may be interested. Tel: 01606 46228
barbara.moth@btinternet.com.

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

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