CHESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

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Newsletter

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Some future events:

* William Andrews Nesfield – 18th November
* Wreath making – 29th November
* Hellebores, Mike Byford – 20th January
* RHS Bridgewater – 24th March
* Visit to Dorothy Clive Gardens – 14th May

Guided walk around historic peatland with Professor John Handley, Saturday 15th July

Last November Cheshire Garden Trust (CGT) was privileged to have a superb informative talk on the making of Cheshire landscape by Professor John Handley, an expert in the field. In July John undertook to lead a walk for CGT around Lindow Common and Lindow Moss, a raised mire peat bog, an area of particular historic and scientific significance

John met us at the car park, armed with very helpful handouts of maps of the area through time – and a spade! We were led firstly through Lindow Common, designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Local Nature Reserve. John traced the history of the Common, including its early habitation by gypsies, prior to being turned into public common land in1897.

It was used for gypsy horse trading, hence Racecourse Road where the horses were put through their paces.

Plaque recording ownership of Lindow Common

John made use of his spade to show us the composition of soil from the Common, which dates back to the Ice Age when gravel, sand and clay were carried down from the Pennines and deposited on the Cheshire plains**.** The resultant wetlands saw weeds, algae and mosses thrive and in time peat formed which eventually sustained trees. John went on to stress the preservation of the heathland. He acknowledged that trees' leaves and needles had choked water supplies and killed flora at ground level in the past, hence the need for careful management. Throughout the year the Countryside Ranger service has extensive work to perform with limited resources. For instance, during winter months areas of woodland may be felled and then scraped as part of the restoration. John again used his spade to show us soil that had been regenerated by the work undertaken (see below). The programme also included invasive

species management and the removal of any garden plant escapees.

We continued our walk along the network of paths around the perimeter of woodland and scrub to come to the man-made lake and a number of wildlife ponds**,** where the Black Lake is subject to blue-green algae management in summer (see below).

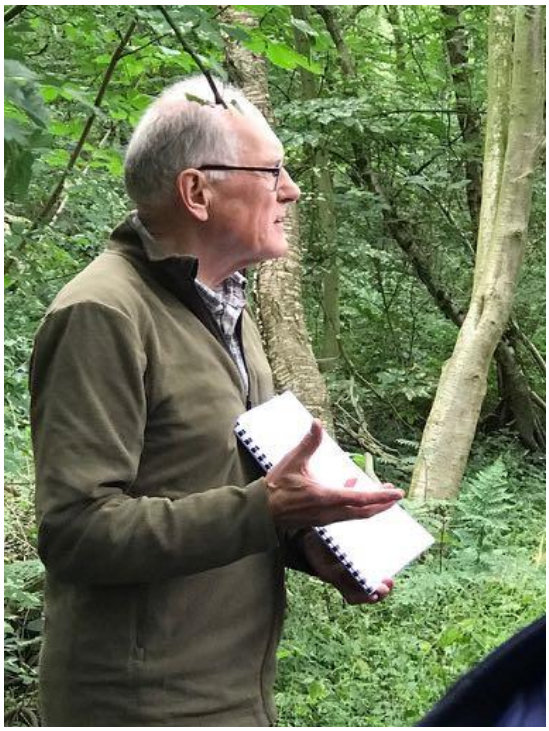
From there we walked to the centre of the peat bog, Lindow Moss, with John pointing out the site of the discovery of Lindow Man. Though internationally renowned the site is not marked in any way *(*see photo on front page**).** Traces of ancient Britons and Celts have been located in this area, possibly taking refuge from the invading Romans. Lindow Man (also known as 'Pete Marsh') was found on April 19, 1984, and was dated to 200AD. He appears to have been a man of certain status who met a very violent end. Further excavations have taken place and a Bronze Age forest has been exposed, with the tree roots facing upwards (see below).

The peat bog once covered over 600 hectares (1,500 acres) and has now shrunk to a tenth of its original size. John showed us photographs of the peat extraction, continued to the present day. While there has been considerable discussion over the future of the site, including even the possibility of residential development, the peat workings have continued on a small scale, with many concerns raised about the damage imposed and the need for the environmental management of such a precious site. We were informed that the future treatment of this historic landscape, including the modern peat workings, is uncertain.

Our sincere thanks to John Handley, who was so informative, and to his wife Pauline. If you have

not yet visited this site, it is definitely worth a visit. Lindow Peat Bog goes to a depth of about 30 metres and is a perfect carbon record of that environment over the last 4-5000 years. It should be preserved.

Margaret Blowey
Photos Margaret Blowey, Pauline Handley, Kath Gee, Beric Bartlett



Laskey Farm – a designer's garden

We met on a rain threatened evening at Laskey Farm in Thelwall. It is not a working farm in the traditional meaning of the word. It was in the Platt family for four generations as a working farm, but when Howard and Wendy Platt bought it in 1996 they did not want to continue the farming tradition. Instead, Howard followed his father in converting the farm buildings into units to be rented out as commercial premises, which has proved very successful. The Platts had hosted an NGS open day the previous weekend and had welcomed 800 people who enjoyed live music and a children's treasure hunt, raising an astonishing £5000 for the NGS.

Originally an art teacher, Wendy retrained as a garden designer at Reaseheath College and now runs her own business designing gardens for others. Her father-in-law had begun to create a garden adjacent to the farmhouse, but Wendy and Howard have extended this by cutting into the large lawn and developing further areas of interest.

Howard showed us the five ponds interconnected by streams which filter the water, one from the other, acting as a cleansing system. The smaller ponds are mainly for wildlife, although one contains about 35 rescued terrapins of several types (see below). These are fed on hot dog sausages or Spam and are great entertainment on open days. During the winter they are taken indoors as they would not survive a severe cold spell.

The water flows constantly over gravel in places and leads to a large pond, surrounded by a glass balustrade, which contains lily pads and many carp, golden orf and sturgeon. This is known as the swimming pond and Howard often swims around the outside, a distance of 30m.

A new addition was a two storey tree house (see above) that stood without a tree for support. Surrounding the garden was a hedge with a path inside it to ease cutting the hedges. The grass had the straightest edges possible, achieved by the gardener/handyman, Steve. The garden is flat and, therefore, Wendy has aimed to introduce structure in the form of trees and a pergola; she has designed the garden in 'rooms' with paths leading you on into the next area, eager to see what awaits. As this is a fairly new garden, only ten years old, many of the features are yet to achieve their full height, but it is full of interest.

The rose garden has David Austin roses, all chosen for their scent and planted by Wendy's father-in-law. They require gentle pruning, but the flowers can be so voluptuous that they break the stems. Whiter Shade of Pale was on the outside of the bed, with Queen Elizabeth in the middle (see below).

Colour is a big part of the garden with a hot bed by the office taking advantage of the warmth from the wall (see page 3). The plants have been chosen for scent and to blend in with each other. Around the pergola, the beds contain purple sage and thyme, with Gertrude Jekyll roses as a back drop. A year old hornbeam has had bark placed under it and a table and chairs, acknowledging that not much will grow in such a shady spot.

Entrance with lavender, herbs and roses, in front of pergola

Trees such as a tulip tree (*Liriodendron*), an *Amelanchier*, a *Liquidambar* and birch, all have their own 'island' circular beds and have been chosen to give interest all the year round.

As the land has good drainage, it has been designed to require no watering, with even dahlias left in over winter. Verbenas seed themselves all over the garden. Wendy believes gardeners are sometimes too quick to weed away germinating seedlings, therefore losing free plants. She also aims to have the garden bee-friendly, with many plants chosen to encourage insects into the garden.

Prunus serrula amidst grasses and perennials

Howard and Wendy have worked together to turn an open, windy field the size of a football pitch into an inviting garden with shelter and interest wherever the visitor looks. The colours, scents and plants make this garden a pleasure to stroll around and it is not surprising that they have managed to raise so much money for charity. Thank you for having us.

Jackie Cawte
Photos Henry Blowey and Sue Eldridge

How many palaces can you fit in a park? A visit to Sanssouci Palace, Germany, in May

The concept of siting a grand house in a parkland setting is a familiar European tradition. However, German royalty went one step further at Potsdam, near Berlin by building a series of royal palaces all in the one park. Frederick the Great was frankly obsessed with the place and his particular triumph was the palace and gardens of Sanssouci.

A short article can only be a minute taster, to encourage CGT members' to make their own visit. The gardens of the Sanssouci Palace are dominated by a series of terraces running down in front of the Palace. Each 'step' contains a line of charming Vineries looking, for all the world, like oversized glass fronted bookcases (below).

Formal gardens, orchards, follies, temples and obelisks complete the grandiose vision.
Beyond Sanssouci but within the same park are several other palaces – some vast and others more in the country house mould. Picking just two, The Orangery with its glazed front elevation, appears at first sight to be just that. However, within lies a series of formal receiving rooms surrounding a central art gallery complete with its 50 copies of Raphael paintings.

Exterior of The Orangery

Interior of The Orangery

On a more human scale is the Neoclassical Charlottenhof Palace which manages to be inspired by the then recent discovery of Pompeii on the outside and, at the same time, distinctly Biedermeier on the inside. Its gardens (see below) have a refreshing lightness compared with some of its grander neighbours. The lawns, pergola and water features seeming to complement the building rather than vie with it for attention.

For much more information go to http://www.potsdam-tourism.com/highlights/palaces.html - or better still make your own visit.

Rupert Wilcox-Baker
Photos Christine Wilcox-Baker

Four Oaks Tradeshow
A glimpse behind the scenes

In September I had the opportunity to look behind the scenes of the horticultural industry at the Four Oaks Trade Show, close to Jodrell Bank. The show, which takes place annually, is now in its 48th year. It is a 23 acre nursery site, with 17,000 square metres under glass.

The show attracts exhibitors from across the world, with over 40% coming from overseas. Visitors include growers, garden centres, landscapers, architects and garden designers. It's a great show to go round. People are friendly and don't mind in the slightest if you take their photo and ask stupid questions.

The things that first attract you are the mature trees, such as the very specialist trees produced by Nippon Tree. This is an Italian firm which uses highly skilled Japanese pruning techniques. To my eyes it looked like cloud pruning, but is actually macrobonsais (Niwaki) – see above, producing beautifully sculptured and balanced trees, a feature in any garden. The most expensive on the stand was *a Pinus pentaphylla*, costing a cool 8,400 euros.

Many of the tree importers are Italian based, often based in Tuscany, where the climate seems ideal for growing trees. For example Consorzio Ortovivaisti Pistoiesi is a cooperative of 28 small producers in Pistoia (between Pisa and Florence). They produce evergreen and deciduous trees, fruit trees, palms, topiary and Niwaki. Giovanelli Stefano, the main contact for the consortium, was on the stand when I visited (see opposite).

Although many of the nurseries represented at Four Oaks are Dutch or Italian there was also a Spanish company with wonderful old olive trees. And then there was Poplar Nurseries, from Wisbech in Cambridgeshire a very traditional bareroot wholesale nursery, particularly specialising in trees, hedging and fruit. Mike Harper, the owner, has been a nursery man for over 50 years and started his business in the late 50s. His description of the methods used in the early days reminded me of some of the Caldwells' reminiscences.

Four Oaks is also an opportunity to see what's new in other areas of plants. There was a fabulous display from Channel Island Plants (see above). They produce cuttings of bedding, patio and perennial plants and supply them direct to growers in the UK and Europe. The mother stock is derived from certified material, produced by micropropagation in the laboratory and supplied in agar. Like many other nurseries it is a family firm and, despite the name, is actually based at Four Oaks Nursery.

David G Ross' stand

At the more traditional end of the industry is another Cheshire based family nursery, David G Ross (see page 6) based in Kettleshulme. It has been in business for 40/50 years. It is a wholesale nursery, with a mail order catalogue, delivering free of charge all over the country, but is also open to the general public at weekends. They try and produce the widest range of plants, producing their own but also buying in some plants.

And then there is the technical stuff, from bugs to big machinery. There were some wonderful big machines for lifting trees (Olema Engineering) and potting plants (Visser and Javo). Javo produces an astonishing range of machinery for potting, and other automatic systems. Three of these were on show at Four Oaks (see opposite).

At the other end of the scale are the bugs. Koppert Biological Systems is the world leader in biological pest control and natural pollination and use all sorts of wee beasties to get rid of aphids, thrip, spider mite etc. The Animal and Plant Health Agency was also there, of which more in the next edition of the newsletter, when we report on the Biosecurity lecture in October.

All in all a fascinating insight into the horticultural industry, some very familiar, some quite unexpected. Also see http://www.fouroaks-tradeshow.com

Text and photos Sue Eldridge

THE GARDENS TRUST

Historic Landscapes Assembly

An Historic Landscape Project Discussion and Networking Day
28th November 2017
10am-5.30pm with **evening lecture and book-signing, 5.45-8.00pm**
The second annual, national networking forum from the Gardens Trust
The Dickens Room, Birmingham and Midland Institute, Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3BS

The Gardens Trust newsletter is now available online http://thegardenstrust.org/publications/newsletters/

CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR OF JAPAN, SPRING 2018

The tour will be a taster of historic gardens old and new. It is designed for those garden lovers who have never visited Japan and would like their first experience of Japanese gardens, food and culture. Centered on Kyoto and its surrounding areas, but also including the gardens of Hiroshima and the nearby Miyajima this tour introduces the travellers to the delights of Japan through its gardens and temples.

If you would like further information on the Historic Landscapes Assembly or Cherry Blossom Tour or any other forthcoming events and lectures visit the Gardens Trust website http://thegardenstrust.org

Repton rambles and the delights of Eastham Ferry

In August nine intrepid researchers visited Hooton, near Ellesmere Port, to explore what remains of the Repton landscape of Hooton Hall, once home to Sir Thomas Stanley. Parking near the Wyatt gateway (below) by the church and with the aid of

historic Ordnance Survey maps and Repton's plan, we followed the course of one of the drives towards the site of the hall. Much of the woodland that existed in 1802 and the plantations proposed by Repton have been succeeded by natural regenerating species, but we found some notable stands of Corsican pine, *Pinus nigra*, with girths indicating early 19th century planting (see below). In the undergrowth were iron gateposts marking the line of the drive and also the ponds marked on Repton's plan.

Much of the model farm remains, including a section of the barn (see below), together with walls from the walled garden and the former coach house and yard which now accommodate a bus depot. The site of the hall lies tantalisingly across

the motorway, denoted by mature trees.

The surprise of the day was Eastham Ferry, just a few miles from Hooton Hall, a site which only came to our attention earlier this year through Wirral History and Heritage day. Eastham Ferry was, as the name suggests, a ferry terminus for passengers between Chester and Liverpool, first recorded in 1357. In the mid 19th century the

The bear pit

Ferry became popular with Liverpudlians seeking a day out from the city. Pleasure gardens were developed to serve these visitors who came in such numbers that a new hotel and pier were built. In their heyday, 1870-1900, the pleasure gardens included a boating lake with water shute, a pierrot stage, a ballroom, bearpit, bandstand, various fountains and in 1894 the Jubilee Arch, a replica of Marble Arch (demolished in 1934). Though the superstructure of these features has gone, many

Site of the Jubilee Arch with guides David Allan and Chris the park ranger

of the earthworks, rockwork, pits and cages, fountain basins and spaces remain within what is now Eastham Ferry Country Park. Though there is no longer a ferry, there are spectacular panoramic views across the Mersey extending from Liverpool to Eastham Locks where the Manchester Ship Canal joins the estuary.

Barbara Moth

Photos Barbara Wright and Barbara Moth

And more Repton news

Bedfordshire Gardens Trust
Repton in Bedfordshire: A Study Day at Moggerhanger Park
Friday 27th April 2018 10 am to 4pm
£50 (includes buffet lunch)

Humphry Repton (1752-1818) was the leading landscape gardener of later Georgian England. He undertook more than 400 commissions during his 30-year career, and created red books that contained "before and after" plans for clients.

Repton was called in at Woburn Abbey, The Hazells in Sandy, Moggerhanger Park and Battlesden Park, and for the first three his Red Books survive. At Moggerhanger Park he produced proposals for Godfrey Thornton in 1792. The house stands in the middle of the park and was remodelled in the 1790s (and later) by John Soane. Now listed Grade I, it was rescued from near-dereliction in the 1990s and is recognised as one of the most complete examples of Soane's work. The programme will include an overview of Repton as a landscape artist by Kate Harwood, a lecturer and writer on garden history, who will be helping to coordinate research on Repton on behalf of the Gardens Trust. Details about the Repton sites in the county, researched and collated by volunteers from Bedfordshire Gardens Trust, will form the basis of the second talk. Guided tours of the landscape, with particular reference to the Repton proposals, will follow the Head Gardener's presentation on his plans for Moggerhanger.

Enquiries to treasurer@bedsgardenstrust.org.uk.

And some news from Christopher Woodward at the Garden Museum:

"Professor Stephen Daniels is curating a major Bicentenary exhibition at the Garden Museum from September to December 2018, which will display Repton's Red Books and watercolours from across the country to tell a story of his work in cities, suburbs and countryside, and to conjure up his life, aspirations, and travels.

This will be the backdrop to a national conference in partnership with the Gardens Trust on Monday 5th November 2018, which will draw together a year of Repton discoveries and new research from across the country".

Dunham Massey Gardens – a request for information

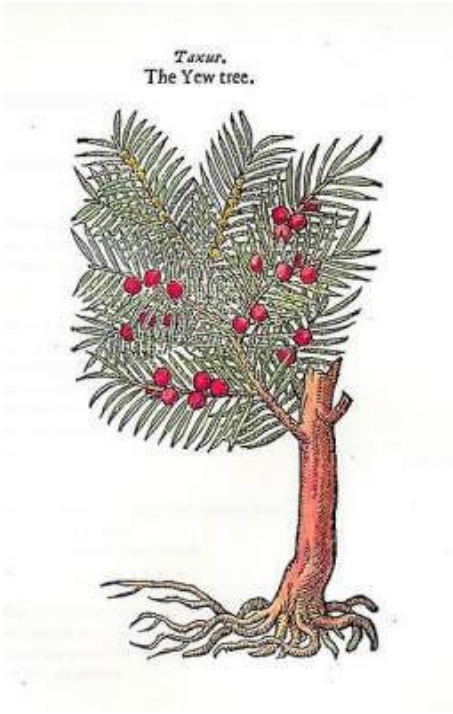
I am undertaking some research about the history of the gardens at Dunham Massey. I have access to a lot of information but, for a wider perspective, I wondered if any CGT members could help. Have you done some research you would be willing to share, have copies of former seasonal garden leaflets or guide books or know any useful websites? I would be particularly interested in anything you could tell me about Denny Pratt and late flowering azaleas and any memories of the National Trust restoration of the gardens in the late 1970s and early 1980s"
I would be very grateful for any help or guidance you can give.

Patricia Hazlehurst
patriciahazlehurst@gmail.com

Stop press - Reaseheath College update

We advertised part-time courses at Reaseheath in the last edition of the newsletter. Unfortunately the ***Garden History*** course, due to start in November, has been postponed and will be reviewed in the New Year. Check the Reaseheath website for details of this and the other courses: *Introduction to Plant Propagation, Design your Garden* and *the Art of Plants,* which should run on Wednesday mornings during the Spring and early summer terms. http://www.reaseheath.ac.uk/adult-learners/horticulture-workshops/
Or contact Karen Keany on 01270 613 211 (email Karen.Keany@reaseheath.ac.uk)

Y is for Yew



The yew (*Taxus baccata*) is one of just 3 conifers native to our country. It is evergreen and poisonous. The leaves contain taxane alkaloids which are used in anti-cancer drugs. One part of the plant is not poisonous – the red aril or fruit. However, this does contain a poisonous black seed which should never be eaten.

Yews live a long time, from 400 – 600 years, but there are many examples around the country which are well over 1,000 years old. Cheshire has several, the oldest probably being the ones found in Goostrey and Astbury churchyards. There is also one in St Mary's churchyard, Eastham, Wirral, which is considered to be about 1,600 years old. According to a plaque by the tree, in 1152 when the Abbot and Monks of St Werburgh's received the manor of Eastham from Earl Randall of Chester, the local people asked the Monks to take good care of the old yew. In 1988, four experts from the Conservation Foundation's Yew Tree Campaign, certified that the age of the tree was about 1,600 years (see below).

Over history, the yew has had many uses. The timber is extremely strong and durable which explains why so many trees with hollow trunks can remain standing. The wood was used in turnery (and still is) and in making long bows and tool handles. A yew spear was found in 1911 at Clacton-on-sea, Essex, and is estimated to be about 450,000 years old. The tree may also have been grown for its dense foliage to shade ice houses, as shown in this photo of the ice house in Marbury Park (see top of page 11).

There is much folk lore associated with the yew tree. It was thought to be sacred to the Druids who planted it by their "temples". "Yew" is our oldest tree name, derived from the Celtic word "ew". When Christianity became the official religion, churches were thought to be built on the site of these temples, so the yew trees were close to the churches, which is where we see so many of the ancient yew trees today. Another theory is that the yew was planted in church yards where cows could not reach it as the tree is poisonous to grazing animals. It has also been suggested that yews were planted in churchyards so their branches could be cut and used on Palm Sunday. What we know for certain is that no-one has been able to explain satisfactorily the connection of the yew tree to churchyards.

yew hedge cut back at Little Moreton Hall

In gardens, yew is often used for hedging as it grows quickly and can be cut back hard if it becomes too large for the site. It is also used in topiary as an alternative to box and some interesting examples may be seen in the formal gardens at Tatton and at Arley Hall, amongst others.

There is also the fastigiate yew or Irish yew. This is a large, bushy, upright evergreen shrub, columnar when young, later broader, with erect shoots bearing radially arranged, dark green leaves. It is often planted on either side of an

yew surrounding remains of ice house in Marbury Park, near Northwich

entrance from one part of a garden to another, which happened at Marbury Park. However, unless maintained, they grow large and can become difficult to distinguish from other yews. If you are interested in the folklore surrounding yew, the following website may be of interest to you: http://www.plant-lore.com

Text and photographs by members of the Research and Recording Group

A tale from Tabley

Users of Chester Road (A556) between Knutsford and Northwich may be familiar with the White Lodge set back from the road across the Waterless Brook. The lodge is situated where the former Knutsford Road entered and then crossed the park. Once the new house was complete in 1767 the Leicesters no longer wanted to see the Knutsford traffic passing their door and had the road diverted to its present course. The White Lodge was built c1770 to mark the entrance of what then became a drive, and ever since has announced the house and parkland which are screened by a boundary belt of trees.

The White Lodge in 1998

Tabley House has belonged to the University of Manchester since about 1976 following the death of the last owner Lieutenant - Colonel John Leicester-Warren. Crown Estates have owned the 1,460 hectares (3,608 acres) estate since 2007. In the past few years Crown Estates have been selling off outlying properties including the gamekeeper's cottage, farmhouses and farm buildings. The White Lodge was also sold, a Grade II listed building of 1770, thought to be by John Carr who designed Tabley House. The lodge had been empty and was in a state of disrepair. In order to make a viable dwelling, the new owners applied for planning permission to extend in 2013. The proposal for additional accommodation to the rear was designed to minimise the visual impact on the historic building and retain the lodge's character.

Building work became protracted and the lodge was sold again in January 2016. Work recommenced and changes began to take place in the surrounding landscape. In recent months these changes have included construction of a crude subsoil mound to the site boundary which degrades the historic landscape and destroys the setting and meaning of the lodge.

The White Lodge September 2017

Having watched with interest and concern for some time it was time to investigate.
First – a quick search of Historic England's website confirmed that the lodge and associated ground with mound lie within the registered parkland (Grade II) of Tabley House.

Next an email to our Gardens Trust colleagues to check whether we had received notice of this planning application. Answer – no, despite the fact that Local Authorities have a statutory duty to notify the Gardens Trust (and previously the Garden History Society) of any application affecting a registered landscape. Then a search of Cheshire East's planning applications produced the application for work to White Lodge, including the planning officer's report and the Notice of Decision.http://planning.cheshireeast.gov.uk/applicationdetails.aspx?pr=13/1417M

Neither the applicant nor the planning officer (who has since left) mentioned that the lodge lay within the registered parkland, and the condition regarding boundary treatment was not specified. After an initial 'phone call to Cheshire East planning I was advised to report a suspected breach of planning online. http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/planning/planning_enforcement/planning_enforcement.aspx Having reported online, Cheshire East promptly confirmed that "*the Local Planning Authority are already investigating the matter along with other issues found at the time of the officer's site visit.*" In response to a further email the Conservation Officer replied expressing her concern regarding the Tabley estate; she is investigating the failure to pick up the designation and follow statutory procedures, and has stated that a new application will be required and that all parties will be consulted. Wait and see.

The moral of this Tabley tale is that if you see something that looks quite wrong, do check;
it is quite likely that it doesn't have planning permission. Local Authority planning, enforcement and particularly conservation officers are all stretched. A recent report by Historic England has noted a further decline in conservation officer numbers. Consequently this makes our contribution as Cheshire Gardens Trust all the more important – contributing to planning policy and consultations, responding to planning applications and in this case, seeing that the law is enforced. At times it seems a thankless task but, gradually, the Trust is gaining influence, raising awareness, and helping to ensure that changes to our historic landscapes respect significance.

Text and photos Barbara Moth

A new home for Parks and Gardens UK with Hestercombe Gardens Trust

Parks & Gardens UK is entering an exciting phase in its development at its new home with the Hestercombe Gardens Trust. In September 2016 Parks & Gardens UK (P&GUK) with Hestercombe Gardens Trust received £97,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to secure the future of the P&GUK database and website of historic designed landscapes.
http://www.parksandgardens.org

Stuck for something to buy your friends at Christmas. Why not treat them to a year's membership of Cheshire Gardens Trust, £15 for single membership, £22 for joint/family membership. Contact The CGT Membership Secretary 4 Albany Grove, Lymm, Cheshire, WA13 9LX. You can download an application form from the Contact section of our website http://www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk/?Join-Us

Behind the scenes at Dibleys Nursery

In the last edition of the newsletter we reported on our visit to Dibleys Nursery in North Wales which specializes in the propagation and growing of the genus *Streptocarpus*, a plant native to South Africa where it grows in woodland. The nursery holds the National Collection of *Streptocarpus*, both species and hybrids (some bred by them under the Plant Breeders Patent). Their intention now is to breed more short stemmed varieties. In this edition, Ruth Brown reports on the more technical side of the business.

The glasshouses, which are of Dutch design, cover approximately ½ acre (2,400 sq.m.). Mobile benches, which negate the need for permanent access spaces, maximize the surface area available for plant production.

Nursery showing cuttings, vapour lamps, vents, insect traps etc.

Irrigation is provided by a drip system and capillary matting on the benches. Rainwater is collected from the glasshouse roof and stored in large tanks. Nutrients with a high potash content to improve flowering are delivered via a dilutor.
Solenoids within the system determine the frequency and quantity of the water supplied. Soil-warming cables on the mobile benches supply the bottom-heat needed for rooting cuttings and stimulating plant growth.

The heating system in the *Streptocarpus* house is fully automated and computer-controlled with continuous monitoring of the valves and hot water. Two large biomass boilers (see below) supply the water via pipes mounted within the glasshouse. These boilers are fuelled by wood chips sourced locally in North Wales. In the mixed glasshouse warmth is supplied by fan heaters. Fully automated thermal screens provide the insulation needed to reduce the amount of heat lost through the glass, thereby saving on fuel bills. A daytime temperature of 18° C is maintained throughout.

An oil boiler is used as a back-up system in case of problems with the heating. Similarly there is a back-up generator in case of electrical failure and power cuts. Some electricity is generated by solar panels on an adjacent building.

It is essential for the glasshouses to have adequate ventilation to ensure that the buoyancy of the air is maintained in order to prevent the build up of pathogens. Ventilation reduces the relative humidity (RH) in the glasshouse close to that of the external atmosphere. This lowering of RH can prevent the condensation of water on the internal surfaces of the house should the temperature suddenly drop. Still moisture around the plants is ideal for the germination of

fungus spores but this will not occur if ventilation is taking place.

Air contains a small amount (0.03%) of carbon dioxide (CO_2) which is essential for plants to photosynthesize at the maximum rate possible in the prevailing light intensity and temperature level. In still air the CO_2 in the atmosphere surrounding the leaves becomes depleted and photosynthesis slows down. The movement of air through the foliage caused by ventilation maintains the concentration at the normal level.

The glasshouses are fitted with ridge ventilators which run the entire length of the house on both sides. The computer-controlled vents open and close according to the temperature and can be pre-set to open as required. In addition the vents react to wind direction and are rain-sensored in order to prevent flooding in the glasshouse.

Motorized light screens provide shading for the Streptocarpus which, being a woodland species, cannot tolerate direct, intensive sunlight. The screens have slits to provide gaps for ventilation and are closed completely at night. Poor natural light in winter and early spring means that plant growth can be slow so on dark days artificial lighting in the form of sodium vapour lights is used to boost the amount of light required to accelerate growth.

Although integrated environmental control in the glasshouses provides continual monitoring of light, temperature, ventilation, etc. so that the requirements of the plants are correctly supplied, there is also an alarm system which alerts staff to any problems. On a frosty morning the alarm may be activated at 2 am. As a consequence it is vital that a member of staff is on duty and can respond.

The nursery has a system of integrated pest control management. Biological control is the preferred method but pests are not a major problem. Thrips, which may appear in the compost, are controlled by introducing the predator *Orius laevigatus*. Chemical control is used only if absolutely essential.

Rex Dibley taking cuttings

A tray of Begonia cutting

Propagation of *Streptocarpus* is by leaf cuttings (see below) which are rooted in a medium of standard compost and vermiculite and bottom-watered. It takes 4-6 weeks for pups (plantlets) to appear. They can then be potted individually. Some varieties are easier to propagate than others. Begonias are also propagated by leaf cuttings but a different medium of 1 part perlite/1 part standard compost/1 part vermiculite is used. Another difference is the use of hormone rooting powder which is used for the begonia cuttings but not for the *Streptocarpus*. Sinclair's professional compost is used throughout the nursery, thereby removing the need for any soil sterilization or mixing of composts.

Streptocarpus wendlandii cuttings

Potting machines are used for filling the pots with compost for potting-on and potting-off and can be adjusted to deliver the correct amount for a variety of pot sizes. The rooted cuttings are inserted by hand. The plastic pots and trays, which are obtained from Germany, are cheaper to buy and lighter to handle and transport than the traditional clay pots.

Light bays (growing rooms), which receive no natural sunlight, but instead have total replacement by artificial lighting, are used to keep the young plants growing at an accelerated rate.

Using this system a higher density of plants can be grown in a relatively small area and they respond well to these conditions. Red/blue tubular lighting (see above) is used in the bays because this conforms to the wavelengths of light at the end of the light spectrum which the plants use for photosynthesis. This light energy is trapped by the chlorophyll within the leaves and used to convert carbon dioxide and water into glucose. The lights are turned off during the daytime and on at night when electricity is cheaper.

In cultivation *Streptocarpus* require some humidity and shade from strong sunlight in the summer plus a resting period during the winter with a min. temperature of 7-10°C (45-50°F). During the growing season regular watering is required but the compost should be allowed to dry out partially between applications, the weight of the pot being the best indicator of the need for watering. During the resting period the plants need to be kept on the dry side.

Dibleys is a family run nursery with members of the family being integral to success. In addition

Begonias in the nursery

to the local workforce, three highly experienced Hungarian horticultural workers have been employed for seasonal work over a number of years. They are an essential part of the nursery production system and there is concern about the impact of Brexit on this arrangement.

Rex Dibley in the glasshouse

Ruth Brown
Photos Jane Gooch, Christine Wilcox-Baker, Sue Eldridge

Kemp Walks in Cheshire Parks

Partnering with other organisations to undertake a themed series of walks celebrating the bicentenary of Kemp's birth has proved a success. It has brought an awareness of Kemp and his work to a wider audience. Three of the walks attracted over forty participants and all walks highlighted the interest there is in local history. At Grosvenor Park Chester the focus was on Kemp's design intentions and how these have been realised or blurred with the passage of time. For the participants at Castle Park Frodsham there was considerable discussion about what Kemp did and what planting may have been done by the owner, Joseph Stubbs a keen plantsman. Kemp's influence can be seen in the layout and planting of Queen's Park, Crewe though the

A magnificent specimen of Hungarian Oak, *Quercus frainetto* in Queen's Park, Crewe

implementation was almost certainly undertaken by others. In Congleton Park there are various features that suggest Kemp's influence – the rockwork, tree planting and oval bowling green – but little that can be definitely attributed to him due to the lack of surviving documents.

Late summer sunshine for the walk in Congleton Park

Through the walks we have gained new insights into the parks and their tree collections – and received requests for more walks.

CGT's Kemp day last March inspired Gloucestershire Gardens Trust to discover and research a previously unknown Kemp commission which is described in their summer newsletter. Our book 'Kemp's Parks and Gardens in Cheshire' is now held by the National Libraries and the RHS Lindley Library in London. Copies were sold at the Gardens Trust conference in Plymouth, are available through our website, and will be available at our forthcoming events.

Text and photos Barbara Moth

If you thought you knew about trees, think again

Someone who has spent a lifetime living with and caring for trees is Peter Wohlleben. He manages a forest in the Eifel Mountains of Germany and he is mostly familiar with beech, oak and spruce. But, more importantly, he understands not just trees, but The Forest. A Forest is not just a collection of trees, it is a creature that just happens to be made up of trees. Despite the superficial similarity, a forest that is hundreds of years old is very different from a woodland planted last century. And both are very different from plantations.

There are some amazing facts in his book 'The Hidden Life of Trees' as he draws on research work from around the world as well as his own observations. So we learn how trees care for and feed one another, talk to each other, protect themselves from pests and diseases.

The book is rather anthropomorphic and a little repetitive. He breaks down his information into easily assimilated chapters so it is not surprising that some points get mentioned more than once as they cross the boundaries of the chapter headings. The English language version was originally published in Canada and the spelling and

language - like fall rather than autumn – have been kept for the British edition. But these downsides should be ignored as the core messages of the book are so fascinating. If you've been wondering what to buy your friends for Christmas – or what to reply when asked what you would like – then you could do worse than take down these details!

The Hidden Life of Trees; What They Feel, How They Communicate; Discoveries from a Secret World is by Peter Wohlleben, published 2017 by William Collins Books and costs £9.99.

Joy Uings

Copy date for January newsletter is 31st December

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, 148 Chester Road, Hazel Grove, Stockport SK7 6HE or email sue_eldridge@hotmail.com