CHESHIRE GARDENS TRUST

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Newsletter

www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

Inside:

Some future events:

- Orchids: The Spode-Bateman connection – Sat 25th February
- Annual Spring Lecture: In the footsteps of Forrest and Banks – Tues 27th March
- Elizabeth Gaskell House, Manchester – t.b.c.
- Dorfold Hall, Nantwich – Wed. 16th May

Hough Garden: an organic garden in Alderley Edge

On the outskirts of Alderley Edge, situated adjacent to the pristine borders and manicured lawns of the area, lies Hough Garden. Here Peter Woollam has a half acre kitchen garden where the planting is lush and where organically grown fruit, vegetables and other useful plants vie for every conceivable space, in fact every plant has a use, be it culinary, medicinal or traditional household.

The black and white timbered cottage next door was once part of a smallholding which belonged to Peter's family. Cows, pigs and chickens were kept and the area which he now owns was used for growing soft fruit. His grandfather was a gardener and his uncle grew potatoes.

Eventually, the cottage was sold but the present garden was retained.

Peter started work on his garden about twenty years ago. The plot was totally overgrown and there were just four beds. Slowly the number has been increased so that now there are nineteen beds surrounded by trimmed grass pathways and he has run out of space for more.

Approximately two hundred varieties of edible plant are grown including one hundred types of vegetable. In order to achieve this, one hundred and fifty sowings per year are necessary. A full list of the seeds is kept on a computer database and a record of how well each performs enables Peter to choose which varieties to sow each year. Similarly, he keeps a list of all the perennials in the garden.

Bee balm and echinacea

The greenhouses at Hough are not heated (there is no electricity or water available on the site) but are used to extend the growing season and provide protection for the more tender vegetables. The seed sowing is done at Peter's home in Macclesfield where he has a heated greenhouse. Most are grown in modules so there is less root disturbance and the plants can remain in their containers until a suitable patch of soil is identified amongst the plants which throng the vegetable beds.

Japanese wineberry

Being on porous sandy soil, Peter uses copious amounts of well-rotted manure and compost to improve water retention and to replace the nutrients which leach away. Liquid comfrey is used during the growing season. Song birds are encouraged into the garden to feed on pests, such as aphids and caterpillars, and a range of flowers attracts beneficial insects. A rotation system is essential in keeping soil-borne diseases, such as club root which damages brassicas, in check. Jays and wood pigeons have to be discouraged. A system of willow twigs inserted into the soil deters the pigeons by preventing them landing on the beds.

Most of the beds are mixed plantings. In addition to the common vegetables and herbs, a range of exotic or unusual plants is grown. The banana which stands proudly in the centre of the garden throughout the summer is housed in a moveable 'Sentry box' during the winter months.

Mallow (the root is used as a thickener for the sweet marshmallow), Chinese artichokes, tree spinach and

Black Cherry Tomatoes

Chinese yams (with their club-shaped tubers up to a yard long) share the garden with sunflowers, sweetcorn, courgettes, pot marigolds, evening primrose, runner beans, teasels, bee-balm, echinacea, red orache and squash amongst others. Many of the annuals are self-seeded.

In the greenhouse are cucumbers, tomatoes (including the unusual Black Cherry tomato with its distinctive dark colour) and tomatillo (used in salsa).

Fruit trees and bushes abound throughout the garden: apples, pears, plums, gages, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries and Japanese wineberries (to name but a few) grow cheek-by-jowl with the vegetables, herbs and flowers. At the lower end of the garden is a woodland area containing hazels, elderberries, hawthorns, bilberries and crab apples; this area can

rightly be called a forest garden. More is being added all the time. This is a garden which never stands still. Here again, every tree and shrub has its uses. For example, the hazel produces not only nuts - the coppiced material is used for pea sticks and poles for supporting climbers. At the end of the growing season this material is stored in dry conditions over winter to be re-used the following summer.

With such a profusion of vegetables and fruit Peter is able to harvest fresh food throughout the year. Vegetables are stored or left in the ground until required and fruit is stored or made into jam (seventy-five jars had been made already by the time of the CGT visit in July). Nothing is frozen but the surplus is sold.

During the winter Peter pursues his other great interests: woodworking and willow weaving. Green oak garden seats, made from heartwood supplied by farmers who have had to fell trees on their land, are his speciality. Willow structures abound in the garden: edging for the vegetable beds, ornamental supports for climbers and woven garden chairs. The soil in the garden is too free-draining for growing willows, so Peter has to source his material from elsewhere. Some is obtained from willow beds in other parts of Cheshire and some is provided by members of the willow group to which he belongs.

Willow Chair

Hough Garden is open to the public on a few occasions during the summer and is well worth a visit - very different and full of innovative ideas. Peter himself has an encyclopaedic knowledge of all growing things, and is on hand to answer any and all questions.

Ruth Brown and Jacquetta Menzies

FOOTNOTE:
Peter still has receipts from Clibran's Nursery for a Denniston Gage (12/-) and two Filberts (6/-) which his father bought.

Congratulations

In her own time, when not working on the Events sub-committee or contributing to the Newsletter, Jacquetta Menzies is a garden designer.

One of her gardens was submitted for The British Association of Landscape Industries 2011 Awards and she was the Principal Winner in the category "Landscape Design Excellence Award, Overall Project Cost under £50,000. The judges held that it was "*A very good example of a design solution for a challenging exposed site with dramatic views*". Find out more on www.jacquettamenzies.co.uk

Congratulations are also due to our member Nick Payne. Although we know him best for his work with the National Gardens Scheme, Nick is also a Director of the Manchester City Galleries Trust and The Tabley House Collection Trust. He was awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honours List "*for services to the arts and heritage in the North West*".

Morrey's Nurseries at Kelsall

Waiting in the sales area of Morrey's Nursery, you often overhear a conversation between a customer and a member of staff about the choice of plants for a new garden on a housing development nearby.

The employee listens, asks about the aspect and then advises on species and variety of trees and shrubs that would grow well there. They know the local area, the soil structure, the texture and the acidity as well as the requirements of their plants. The clients make their purchase and leave satisfied, knowing that they had been given sound advice.

Morrey's Nursery is one of the few remaining traditional nurseries in Cheshire where over 90% of the plants sold have been propagated on site. They have the specialist knowledge and skills reminiscent of the days before the advent of the garden centre.

So when Cheshire Gardens Trust announced a privileged visit to "see behind the scenes" at Morrey's in September 2011, it was enthusiastically supported.

Before showing us their working methods, Alison Franks (neé Morrey) the current proprietor, told us about the history of the company. The nursery was established in 1910 when Frederick Morrey purchased the land. Early O.S. maps show the field structure prior to the purchase.

Frederick Morrey began by growing cut flowers to supply the Manchester market. These were transported from the nursery near Kelsall by horse and cart to Delamere Station and from there by train to Manchester Piccadilly. Frederick Morrey was succeeded by his son Ellis, and then by his grandson David. Now his great granddaughter Alison runs the company.

Ellis Morrey.

Photo from the 1960 Golden Anniversary Catalogue

The war years of 1939-45 were very difficult for Morrey's Nursery. The Ministry of Agriculture decreed that, instead of flowers, vegetables should be grown at the nursery; these too were transported to the Manchester markets by train. And with local men enlisted and fighting overseas, Italian prisoners of war who were billeted nearby were employed working in the fields.

After the war, Ellis Morrey visited a number of nurseries in Boskoop in Holland and let it be known that he wanted to employ a propagator. This is how Marinus Vurens came to the nursery to teach the staff the technique of grafting, in particular bud grafting of roses in the field. His influence was immense and his compost mixtures, written in Dutch, can still be seen in his notebook kept on the shelf above the grafter's bench. Soon Azaleas and heathers, trees like Acers, and shrubs like Rhododendron were being propagated. During the CGT visit, we were able to watch today's skilled staff grafting Viburnum varieties onto rootstock and taking cuttings of variegated ivy.

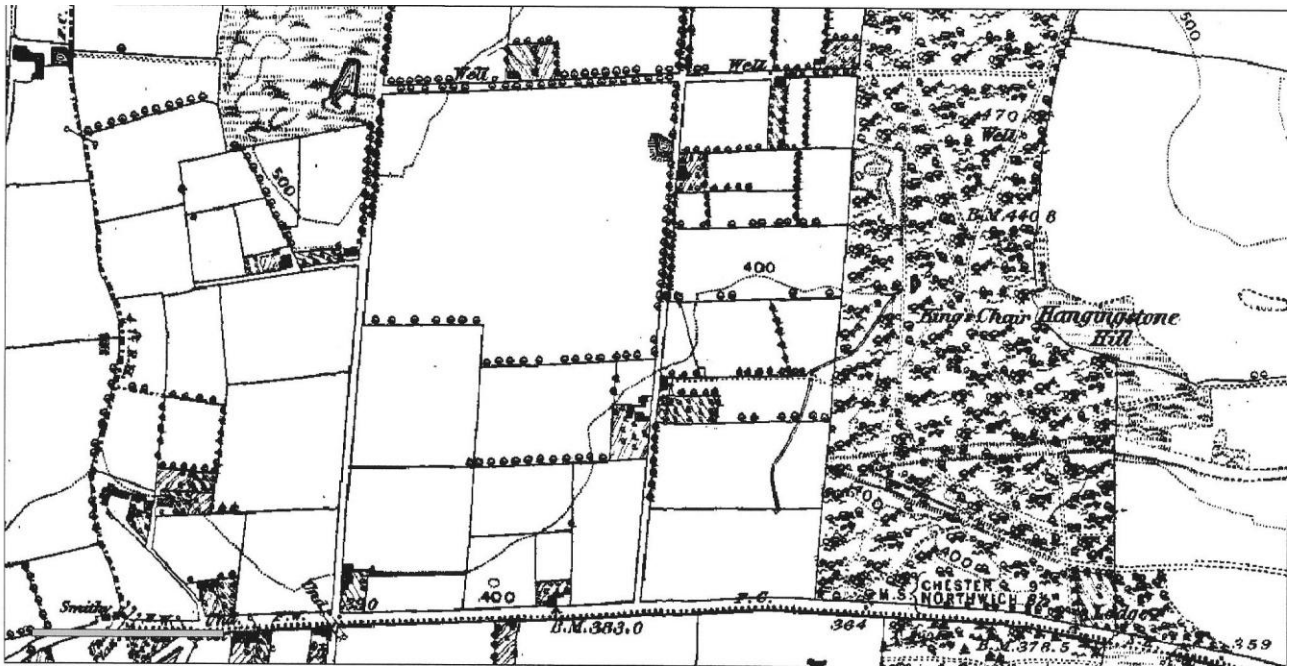
Staff taking ivy cuttings

In the mid-80s, a planning proposal for the new Kelsall bypass might have caused the total destruction of the company had it not been taken to a Government Enquiry. Most of the site was saved but a house and sheds were lost and the sales area had to be completely rebuilt. Fortunately the nursery recovered from this disruption and the land now extends to over 110 acres, some of it away from the main site in Kelsall.

Morrey's is a typical working nursery with propagation houses, polythene tunnels, frames, workshops and machinery sheds. There is a cold store, packing shed, potting area, container standing area and acres of nursery fields.

Alison Franks answering queries

1875 O.S. map showing the field structure prior to Morrey's Nursery becoming established



Map reproduced courtesy of Cheshire Archive and Local Studies, Duke Street, Chester, CH1 1RL. See their website at http://maps.cheshire.gov.uk/tithemaps/

The glasshouses were built in the 1950s and are heated by hot water pipes but this is expensive, especially in the current economic climate. Alison would like to install solar panels and has even considered geothermal energy but this is not feasible at present.

The nursery employs 20 staff, only one part-time, and most are long serving. Alison works hard to provide employment for the loyal workforce all year round and, to this end, during the severe winter of 2010/11 a number of Magnolias were potted on into larger than usual containers. The plants did extremely well, being of a good size and high quality.

Much of the land is surrounded by extensive hedging which takes 3-4 weeks to trim. The soil for the most part is sandy and tends to be acidic. Not all the land is suitable for growing – some of it is wet and so is left fallow. In the most free-draining areas irrigation can be a problem, even though the nursery has its own borehole. Rabbits are the scourge of the nursery, especially in the sandy areas but even container-grown plants suffer. Wire netting and tree spirals are used to protect the young shrubs and trees. Apart from waging war on the rabbits, Morrey's like to look after the environment and have adopted a regeneration policy. They own their own peat bog in Wilmslow and in the '60s and early '70s, they cut the peat for mixing into compost back at the nursery. Today the land is still owned by Morrey's but is untouched and left as natural woodland.

Being a traditional nursery, Morrey's still favours field production for many of its trees and shrubs, including fruit trees, yews, hollies, conifers, rhododendrons and hedging materials. Plant growth is often superior in the field compared with that in containers. The plants are grown in rows where they remain for 5-15 years depending on the variety and the size required. Some are grown to be specimen trees which have to be undercut and lifted by machinery when harvested. The field-grown material is lifted during the dormant season and sold either bare-rooted or root-balled in hessian.

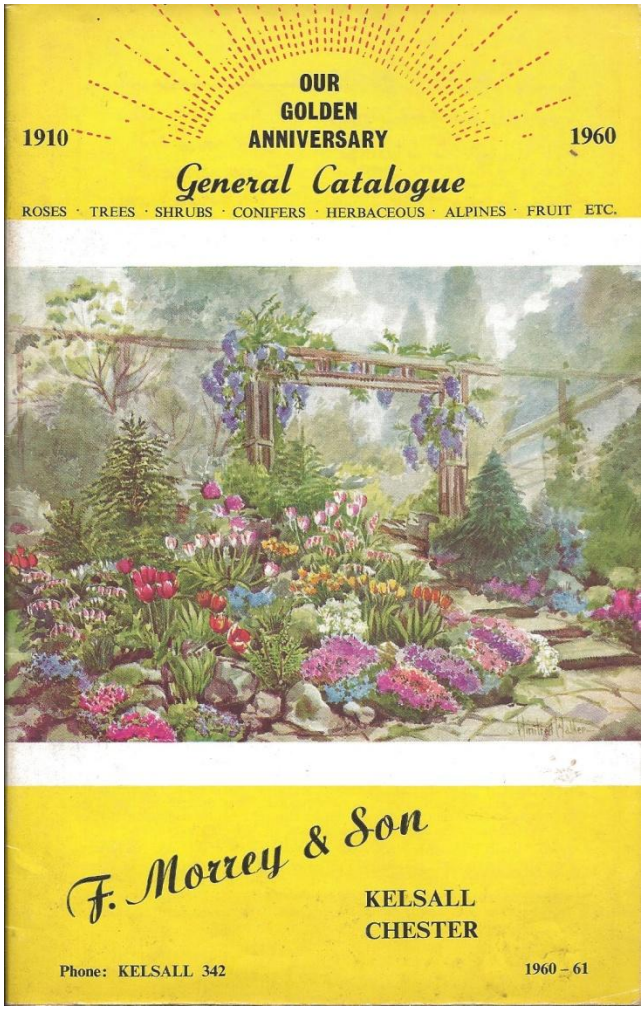
The standing ground is the area of the nursery where the container-grown plants are lined out for growing on either for moving into a larger container or for sale directly. A major requirement is a good supply of water because dry weather can soon induce stress in a container-grown plant. Another consideration is shelter – a strong wind can quickly dry out a plant and its growing medium. Also plants grown by this method are more susceptible to cold than those grown in the soil and protection is essential in a severe winter. Container-grown plants can be sold at any time of the year because there is no root disturbance at the time of purchase.

Container grown Rhododendron varieties lined out

Annually, Morrey's supplies in bulk to a vast range of outlets, for example councils, golf courses, hospitals and new housing developments. They supply to local landscapers and designers of private gardens. The National Memorial Arboretum and Bodnant Gardens are among their customers. In recent years, Morrey's has seen a shift away from wholesale towards retail sales, mainly due to competition from abroad, in particular The Netherlands. Today, a wide range of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants is always available in the retail sales area and a catalogue is available from the shop and online. Morrey's is not a garden centre; it is a nursery, open Monday to Saturday where you can always find specialist professional advice when you require it. There are no afternoon teas, just a warm welcome!

Morrey's 2012 Catalogue and more pictures of the nursery can be found on their website at http://morreys-nursery.com/contact.html.

Ruth Brown & Freyda Taylor with the help of Alison Franks



The words of W.E. Morrey in an extract from the 1960 Golden Anniversary Catalogue (opposite):

"To our Customers and Friends

"It is 50 years since our nurseries were founded here at Kelsall, and we are proud to mark the occasion with a larger catalogue of the best plants in the trade to-day. We are confident that our hardy-grown stock will satisfy you and we look forward to the pleasure of receiving you kind enquiries.

"The methods of selling have changed somewhat in the half-century of our business, and nowadays when plants can be bought from the multiple store it is all the more important that you seek the advice and service of the true nurseryman before stocking your garden. We have the experience, the knowledge and the desire to serve you, and our plants cannot fail to give you lasting pleasure in your garden."

W. E. Morrey

Chelsea Physic Garden

Not far from the Royal Hospital Chelsea, hidden behind a high brick boundary wall and sandwiched between the Embankment and Royal Hospital Road lies one of our truly amazing historic gardens, the Chelsea Physic Garden.

This was our venue for the Institute of Horticulture AGM 2011 and Conference in October and in this historic setting our theme was "Here Today, Who's Here Tomorrow?" – a focus on young people in horticulture. Could we, in such a historic place, be anything but positive especially as our guest speaker was Roy Lancaster. It goes without saying our role and challenge as individuals must be to inspire, equip and retain young people who enter into our industry.

But what of the garden and its history? This intensively planted garden is home to around 5,000 taxa, all contained in an area less than four acres. The layout of the garden and its collection reflects its history as a physic garden specialising in medicinal and useful plants and highlighting the influential horticulturists and scientists who over the past three hundred years have been associated with the garden and its development. Its present role is as a place to educate visitors about the diversity of plants and their importance in today's world.

The garden was founded in 1673 by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London whose crest is above the gates from the garden onto the Embankment, in the past the direct route to the River Thames. It was originally established for the apprentices to learn, grow and recognise plants and study their uses in medicine, horticulture and botany. Its great benefactor was Sir Hans Sloane who had himself studied here as an apprentice apothecary, and who in the early 1700s purchased the freehold of the land when the Society of Apothecaries was unable to find the sum needed. In 1722 he granted them the lease in perpetuity as a Physic Garden at five pounds per year on condition 'it be for ever kept up and maintained as a physic garden'.

Sir Hans Sloane

The garden's work was greatly enhanced when Sloane appointed Philip Miller as gardener in 1722. Miller was probably the greatest horticulturist of his day and his appointment raised the reputation of the garden to be one of the most important in Europe for its amazing variety of plants sourced from all climates. During his time at Chelsea – and he remained there until 1770 – Miller published eight editions of his famous Gardeners Dictionary, which first appeared in 1731 and became the standard work for horticulturalists in the English speaking world.

Since its founding, the exchange of plants and seeds with other institutions has led to important economic outcomes. In 1732, at the request of Sloane, Miller sent seeds of a number of important crops including cotton to the new colony of Georgia in America.

And what to see in the garden? The largest olive tree (*Olea europa*) in the British Isles, a fine old cork oak (*Quercus suber*) and, under glass, cool-growing ferns, succulents, orchids and carnivorous plants together with plants from the Canaries, Azores and Madeira. Some of the plants from the Atlantic Isles are outdoors thriving in this micro-climate within central London. Whilst walking around the well laid out pathways you will come upon the oldest man-made rock garden in Europe, which has a Grade 11* listed status. The rocks forming the rockery include pieces of carved stone which were once part of the Tower of London and basaltic lava which had been used as ballast on Sir Joseph Banks' ship on a voyage to Iceland in 1772.

So much to see in this fascinating garden and finally, don't miss the plant which now has to serve time caged all because of female curiosity!!

Just a brief overview and introduction to London's oldest botanic garden to be simply enjoyed the next time you have a few hours to spare in the heart of the capital.

For more details look it up on the web www.chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk. Opening times; April to the end of October, plus special days. Visitors information: Tel:- 0207 352 5646. For those not on the web and/or requiring further information, please phone the writer on 01625 428215.

Gordon J Darlington

Restoring Elizabeth Gaskell's Garden

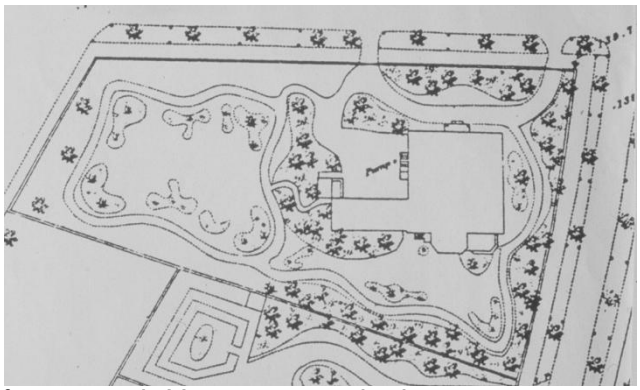
84 Plymouth Grove, Manchester is a Grade II* detached Regency-style Villa built in the 1830s. The house is a rare survival of its type, being complete in nearly all its internal features in the main rooms and with an exterior which has been little changed. As a Grade II* it is among the top 7% of buildings in this country. Architecturally it has a special significance to Manchester as it is one of the few surviving houses of its type in the area. The garden features are now lost and a new garden is to be created in sympathy with the criteria discussed below.

William and Elizabeth Gaskell moved to their house in Plymouth Grove, Longsight, Manchester on 10 June, 1850. It was there that Elizabeth pursued her

The Gaskell House, Plymouth Grove

busy life as the wife of a Unitarian minister and mother of four daughters, together with her successful writing career. With the restoration of both house and garden, their home will once again become a centre for cultural activities and play a role in the life of the local community.

Her letters are full of references both to their family life in, and the importance of, their garden. Gardens and nature are also a continuing theme to be found in her writing. The restoration of the garden will enable visitors to appreciate its importance to the Gaskells and relate the planting to her work. The garden is also an example of a national movement known as Villa Gardening. Their garden, with its inclusion of animal husbandry (a cow, pigs and hens), is unusual and makes the restoration nationally important. It will offer both the Gaskell student and the Garden Historian a chance to see an example of a villa garden



from an early Victorian city suburb.

From O.S. Map Manchester 1848, Plymouth Grove, Longsight

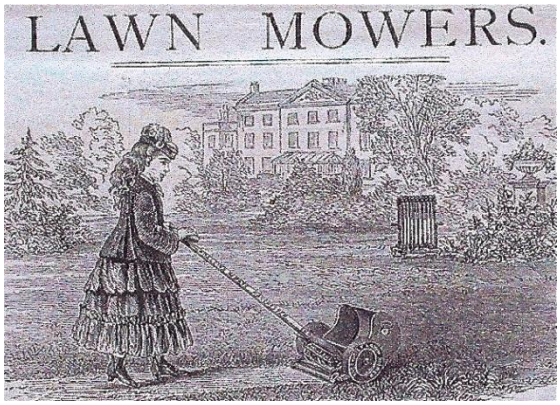
The restoration will take as its starting point the plan of the garden that is seen here on the 1848 O.S. map of Manchester.

The map shows features which may have survived in the garden during Elizabeth Gaskell's time as she lived there from 1850 until her death in 1865. This is the time span to be used when considering the design. William continued to live here until his death in 1885 and two daughters continued in residence until the early 20th century.

Changes in the garden's design can be followed by examining subsequent O.S. maps but, as already mentioned, the critical period is 1850 to 1865. (The site is now confined to the area to the right surrounding the house. The area to the left is now occupied by a block of flats.)

Other sources will include the gardening books and magazines available in this period. *The Gardener's Chronicle* and *The Gardener's Magazine* were available at The Portico Library, Mosley Street, Manchester where William was Chairman. Records show he borrowed at least one copy of the former. Elizabeth could have read them both in the Reading Room, though, as she complained in one of her letters, three months after the men had access. This drew the comment 'I think I shall go in for women's RIGHTS'.

Many gardening books were especially written for women readers, some even encouraged the lady of the house to participate in practical gardening. This seems to have been second nature to Elizabeth Gaskell. The books give advice, often in a seasonal format, and include lists of suitable plants and planting plans. These publications would have given access to the latest gardening information including the latest plant introductions and fashions. Sourcing plants would not have been difficult. Local nurseries flourished – including Caldwell's in Knutsford – and they also supplied seeds. Her letters make it clear that she had many wealthy gardening friends and acquaintances: then, as now, swapping plants was a common practice.



Part of an advertisement appealing to ladies and showing a typical villa garden

It seems clear after examining all the evidence so far that Elizabeth Gaskell's strong personality and determination, together with her memories of her Cheshire childhood, ensured she was quite capable of being her own garden designer. Her letters show her passion for plants, especially common ones, together with a love of vegetable gardening and domestic animal husbandry. There is every reason to suppose that she adapted the garden they inherited into a very special garden for her family.

Few villa gardens of this period survive. This will make the restoration project, especially with the Gaskell connection, of national as well of local significance. For the Gaskells it was their family garden and this above all will be the aspect we hope to capture when recreating the garden. What a guide we have! As one letter states 'I believe the garden will be a great delight ... It will be gay and bright with common flowers ... Every day they (the children) go there: and every new flower that peeps up is a treasure.'. We hope our visitors will feel the same.

Ann Brooks

[*The Manchester Historic Buildings Trust, through partnerships with others, is working on the restoration of the building and garden which will act as a flagship for the regeneration of a socially disadvantaged area of Manchester. The main reception rooms will be open to the public and used for lectures, exhibitions and seminars, encouraging the study of Elizabeth Gaskell's works and of Victorian Manchester, and will have an economically viable future. The Trust is applying to the Heritage Lottery for £1,000,000 to restore the house and gardens to their former glory and make them available for public, community and residential uses.*]

This is the first in a series about features in the designed landscape culled from our research and recording. This will take an alphabetical approach though we are not promising entries for X and Y! Contributions to the series are welcome as are suggestions regarding which features you would like to see included.

A is for ..... Avenue

An avenue is two or more rows of trees parallel to each other, sometimes with a walk or drives between and focused on a hall or eye catcher, the trees regularly spaced, most often of a single species, and in some cases trimmed to a particular form[1].

John Evelyn is attributed with the first use of the word avenue, recording in his diary 25th August 1654 '*I went to see Kirby, a very noble house of my Lord Hatton's in Northamptonshire, built `a la moderne; the garden and stables agreeable, but the avenue was ungraceful and the seate naked*'[2].

Avenue planting became popular between 1660 and 1750 following the Restoration, when garden geometry, influenced by French and Dutch style, extended into the landscape via avenues, reflecting the landowner's power and domination. Estates of this period are most vividly recorded in the drawings of Leonard Knyff (1650 - 1722), engraved by Johannes Kip (1653 - 1722).

Favoured species for avenues were lime, elm, horse chestnut, sweet chestnut, beech, oak and conifers[3]. The oldest lime avenue in Cheshire is at Adlington, said to have been planted in 1688 to celebrate the accession of William and Mary[4]. The popularity of different varieties of lime may have been, as stated by Evelyn, that '*besides its unparallel'd beauty for walks .... it will grow on almost all grounds: That it lasts long; that it soon heals its scars; that it affects uprightness; that it stoutly resists a storm; that it seldom becomes hollow*'[5].

The estate at Dunham Massey was engraved by Kip in 1697, and then recorded in a remarkable series of aerial views by John Harris the Younger in 1751. In Harris's paintings avenues radiate from the hall and divide the park into compartments. The avenues provide the structural framework for the landscape. The singly planted trees depicted by Kip and Adrian van Diest (1697) develop into avenues of multiple trees laid out in quincunx formation by the time of Harris's paintings[6]. The National Trust is replanting the South Avenue and Charcoal Drive avenues in quincunx formation with research and guidance from the Debois Landscape Survey Group.

Formal landscapes fell out of fashion and many avenues were lost with the arrival of the English Landscape movement whose leading exponent was 'Capability' Brown. Brown's successor Humphry Repton produced proposals for re-landscaping Tatton Park but he retained the earliest feature of the designed landscape, the Beech Avenue or Broad Walk, which had been planted with alternate beech and Scots pine by 1740. Today only beech trees remain.

The avenue at Tatton Park

The National Trust recently commenced a three year survey of avenues within their care.

Avenue planting became popular again in the mid 19th century in association with country houses and public parks but never on the scale of 17th and early 18th century plantings. At Marbury Park near Northwich James Hugh Smith Barry employed Anthony Salvin, to extend the hall in the style of a French chateau (1856), and William Andrews Nesfield designed a correspondingly formal landscape[7]. The house was demolished in 1969 but the lime avenues, thought to be c.1856, were extended with additional planting when Marbury became a country park c. 1974.

Marbury Park

Grosvenor Park in Chester was designed by Edward Kemp (1867). The park includes an avenue of clipped holly and lime now focusing on a statue of the 2nd Marquis of Westminster erected in 1869 after the Marquis's death. The limes are pruned to retain shape and scale.

Pleached limes, planted in 1851, form an impressive approach to Arley Hall, and demonstrate the popularity and versatility of the species.

Grosvenor Park

Aging avenues inevitably suffer loss due to storm or disease. Avenue restoration poses a dilemma because trees planted to fill gaps never catch up with the original planting.

Replacement trees at Queen's Park, Crewe have yet to make an impact

Replacement trees can be disadvantaged by overshadowing of established avenue trees. As condition deteriorates, historic avenues lose structure and impact as design features. In some instances, as at Hampton Court, the remnants of the avenues have been felled to allow complete replanting. This has resulted in loss of historic fabric. In other situations, such as Dunham Park, partial replanting has been undertaken. This involves clearing and replanting in sections so that viewed along its length, the effect of the avenue is retained. Planned replacement in sections should, in time, provide a consistent avenue. Both approaches allow for continuation of the avenue as a feature in the designed landscape.

This article only mentions a few examples of avenues in Cheshire. If you have noted others while travelling or walking, please let us know.

Maria Luczak and Barbara Moth

Notes:

[1] According to Chambers Dictionary an avenue is "the principal approach to a country-house bordered by trees; a double row of trees, with or without a road; a wide and handsome street with or without trees".

[2] Bray, W editor.1818. *The Diary of John Evelyn*. London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co, 288

[3] **Couch, Sarah M., '*The Practice of Avenue Planting in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*'**, Garden History, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Autumn, 1992), pp. 173- 200

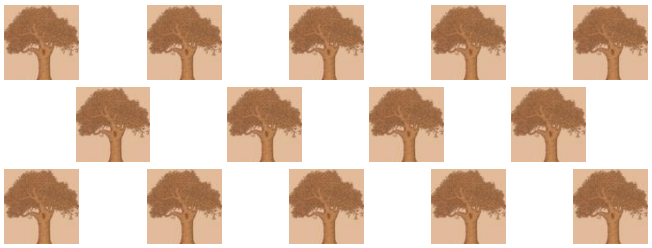
[4] Smart, R. 1992. *Trees and Woodlands of Cheshire.* Chester: Cheshire Landscape Trust, 102

[5] Evelyn, J. 1664. *Silva, or a discourse of forest- trees and the propagation of Timber*: reprint. Brough, Trollius publications, 124

[6] Harris's paintings are owned by the National Trust but reproduced in *The Artist and the Country House* (1985. Sotheby's) by John Harris, together with Adrian van Diest's painting

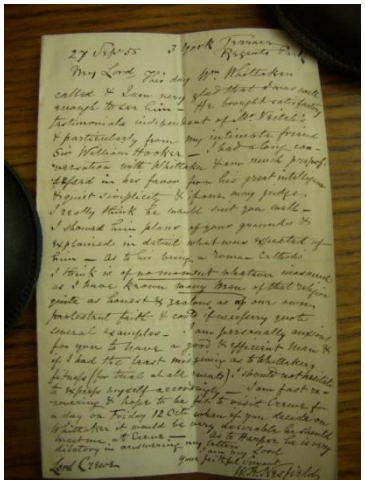
[7] Northwich Woodlands Heritage Explorer booklet

Qunicunx = a pattern of five, with one at each corner of a square and one in the middle – think 5 on a dice. It gives a pattern like this:



For further reading Sarah Couch's article on avenue planting, listed above, is recommended.

News from Research and Recording



Nesfield and Crewe Hall

On the left is a photograph of another highlight from our forays in the Cheshire Record Office - a letter of 1855 from W. A. Nesfield, one of the foremost landscape designers of his day. He was engaged by Lord Crewe on a range of work at Crewe Hall, which included one of his famously complex parterres of coloured gravels and massed plants.

A transcript of the letter is on the next page. As one would expect, Nesfield is well connected; Veitch are the nurserymen 'sans pareil' and William Hooker the first director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. As we often find in Research and Recording group, the general social history is every bit as interesting as the horticulture, for example the style of writing is everything one would expect from a 19th century gentleman. Your correspondent of course shares Mr Whittaker's religious persuasion……You will be pleased to know that Mr Whittaker was employed by Lord Crewe. ***Maria Luczak***

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27 Sep [18]55 3 York Terrace
Regents Park

My Lord,

This day Wm. Whittaker called & I am very glad that I was well enough to see him – He brought satisfactory testimonials independent of Mr. Veitch's & particularly from my intimate friend Sir William Hooker – I had a long conversation with Whittaker & am much predisposed in his favour from his great intelligence & quiet simplicity – & if one may judge – I really think he would suit you well – I showed him plans of your grounds & explained in detail what was expected of him – As to his being a Roman Catholic I think is of no moment whatever in as much as I have known many men of that religion quite as honest & zealous as of our own protestant faith & could if necessary quote several examples –I am personally anxious for you to have a good & efficient man & if I had the least misgiving as to Whittakers fitness (for trial at all events) I should not hesitate to express myself accordingly – I am fast recovering and hope to be fit to visit Crewe for a day on Fri 12 Oct when if you decide on Whittaker it would be very desirable he should meet me at Crewe – as to Harper he is very dilatory in answering my letters

I am my Lord

your faithful Servant

W. A. Nesfield

Lord Crewe

One in Eight Garden Visits are in Cheshire: True or false?

This 'little known fact' can now be found all over the internet. But where did it originate? And is it true?

Dear Tina

Many thanks for the latest CGT mailing which begins with the 'little known fact that one in eight of all garden visits in Britain takes place in Cheshire'.

I feel it's time to say that this oft-repeated claim is without firm foundation and is almost certainly false. As a consultant I undertook a study on the tourism potential of Cheshire Gardens back around 2004, for Cheshire County Council. Happily it led to the 2008 Year of Cheshire Gardens and to the continuing cooperation and marketing activities between several of the largest gardens. The One in Eight assertion was circulating at that time but no-one seemed to know its origin. It may be unfortunate to spoil a good story with the facts but in reality most of the gardens in Cheshire have useful attendances but are not in the biggest league nationally. Kew Gardens had over 1.1m paying visitors in 2010, RHS Wisley over 800,000 and the Eden Project – if you call that a garden – received over 1m visitors. There are several such as Stourhead in Wiltshire or Nymans in Sussex in the 200,000- 300,000 a year grouping whereas in Cheshire even the top garden attendances are well below those levels.

The subject is bedevilled by difficulties. Firstly many gardens do not report their figures so it is difficult to make precise calculations. Secondly there's a problem of definition: what exactly is a garden? I have a inkling that whoever started this hare running included the 1m plus a year visitors to both Bridgemere Nursery and Stapeley Water Gardens – both garden centres in my book, all 800,000 who visit Tatton (but only a proportion of whom enter the gardens) – and visitors to Cheshire Zoo which is primarily ... a zoo!

Does it matter? I don't believe so. Cheshire has a cluster of lovely gardens in contrasting settings, beautifully presented and a delight to visit. Let's just enjoy them!

Kind regards

Graham Nicholson

Do you know where the statistic came from? Why not write and let us know.

More from Caldwell's oral history… and a disaster from the past

Rodney Jakeman worked in the greenhouses at Caldwell's in the early 1960s, mostly mixing compost, potting on and putting customer orders together, which was his favourite task. Below he recalls the clay pots, sized in thimbles to fourteen inch, made by Richard Sankey of Bulwell, Nottinghamshire, and the watering.

" *In each greenhouse there were, below ground, or level with the floor, or just a little below, brick built cisterns which held about five hundred gallons each, of rainwater from the gutters, from the glass, from the roofs, but it was also supplemented by a mains supply of course because you needed that for watering the bedding plants outside. But the rainwater was used for watering all the plants indoors using a half gallon watering can. You could dip your can in the water and water the plants. And Harry England [the foreman], and also this Mr Ollier [who helped make up the Christmas wreaths], they did a lot of the care and maintenance of the pot plants while they were growing because there were certain things you had to do, on-going things, dead heading flowers and also dead leafing, taking the dead leaves off as they matured, always one or two to keep them tidy, and also watering, cos they were clay pots. You can tell when the pot was dry because if you tap it, it rang like a bell and if it was sufficiently moist it was like a dull, like hitting stone, like a dull thud. So one of the tricks of the trade was the foreman he used to have a length of cane, about three foot long, thick as his little finger, and he had a little spent cotton bobbin pushed on the end of it, through the hole in the centre, and all the plants were lined out in rows on the benches, like cyclamen, things like that.... and he used to go round every day tap tap tap tap ..... a can in one hand and this bobbin on a stick, and tap like that, and every time he heard a tinkle he would fill it up with water and if a dull thud he left it alone. Every morning and more in spring when the sun was getting hotter, a daily routine. And that is the only thing I have now, very occasionally, I dream of doing that job at Caldwells, after over forty years, back in the greenhouses.*"

This greenhouse is at Audley End but clay pots can have their down-side…

The following story was first reported in the Doncaster Gazette and repeated in The Blackburn Standard on 25 May 1836.

Thomas Clark was a nursery and seedsman in Retford, Nottinghamshire. During the winter of 1835-6 he spent much time and great care nursing the 3,000 plants growing in clay pots in his greenhouse. He had brought them to "*uncommon perfection*". Then: disaster!

On a Thursday morning, early in May 1836 his greenhouse collapsed. As it fell, it brought down the staging on which those plants were growing. Greenhouse, staging, pots and plants fell in a heap of broken wood, clay and stems.

Stop Press! We are now in a position to take the Caldwell Project on to its next stage, thanks to a grant of £3,000 from the Royal Botanical and Horticultural Society of Manchester and the Northern Counties. We shall be able to set up the database and train volunteers to input the data from one of the ledgers. If you would like to get involved in this – or would simply like to know more about what it entails – get in touch with Barbara Moth (details below).

Introductory Session at Cheshire Records Office for Research and Recorders, or would-be research and recorders

An introductory session has been arranged at Cheshire Records Office Duke Street, Chester, CH1 1RL, for **Monday 27th February, 10.30 – 12noon.**

There will be a general introduction to the record office, what archives they hold, tips on searching the catalogue, and which sources are most likely to be of use in parks and gardens research.

The second part of the session will focus on two example sites that the Trust is researching to demonstrate use of sources and the variety of material available.

Interested? Please contact Barbara Moth 01606 46228 or barbara.moth@btinternet.com

That deadly vegetable … *the cucumber*!

I can only assume that Lady Bracknell, not to mention her nephew Algernon, did not read the newspapers. I'm sure you remember in The Importance of Being Earnest, when Algernon and Jack ate all the cucumber sandwiches that had been prepared for Aunt Augusta – and I bet you've never thought of them as dangerous. Little did you know…

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, Mr. Thweat, head of the firm Thweat, Galley and Munday, died. At dinner he had eaten heartily of cucumber. Then, as he passed through the kitchen he had a drink of milk – and "*in an hour after he was a corpse*".[1]

Not convinced? On 16 August, 1850 The Standard published a "*CAUTION TO CUCUMBER EATERS*". John Watkins of Evesham had eaten **three** cucumbers with his supper and then called for a pint of ale. But one sip was more than enough – "*he was seized with rattling in his throat„*" and was dead by morning.

Seven years later it was Martha Yewel of Bethnal-Green. She ate some cucumbers for supper and went to bed. But in the morning she was violently ill and despite her husband's attempted remedies, she died. The Coroner's inquest gave the verdict "*That the deceased died from inflammation of the intestines, accelerated by eating decayed cucumbers*".[2]

Perhaps their cucumbers had been dealt with like the ones in Bury in 1833. Someone had been breaking into gardens and stealing cucumbers. The Garden Committee took action and a notice went up, informing the thieves and receivers that "*the proprietor had concealed a portion of poison within two of the cucumbers stolen*".[3] Perhaps just scare tactics, but The Manchester Times took it seriously and berated the Committee.

In Lyons, France, there was a homoeopathist called Des Guidi who hated cucumbers. He had a patient, Dolfus, who loved them. Dolfus suffered from gout and Des Guidi held that this was caused by his eating cucumbers. One day Des Guidi was told that Dolfus had died – "*I always told him those cursed cucumbers would be the death of him*", he said. But Dolfus had died in a street accident. "*Had it not been for the accident, Dolfus would surely have died of cucumber!*" Des Guidi conveniently ignored the fact that Dolfus was turned eighty![4]

The idea that cucumbers could be bad must have been widely held. In 1880 the Aberdeen Weekly Journal carried the story of a man who was still healthy, despite having taken out a health insurance policy.

What a con! He'd done everything he could to be ill – hung around fever patients, got his feet wet, slept in damp sheets, smoked dogwood (!), ran backwards off a steep bank, "*ate green cucumbers all last August*", drank icewater every day after work. But it was no use – "*here I am as hearty as a buck*".

Despite these scare stories, cucumbers were popular. Viscount Milton and Dr. W.B. Cheadle included an anecdote in their book The North-West Passage by Land. Arrived in Yale, they met an American who was rather the worse for drink. He "*was possessed with the idea that he was Lord Nelson, and associating the great admiral in some way with cucumbers, ate several in succession to prove his identity.*

Let's finish with a heart-warming and non-fatal story. In the eighteenth century, cucumbers were classed as luxuries. The sister-in-law of John Raffald (who had been the head gardener at Arley Hall) was minding her husband's market stall when she was approached by a woman who asked the price of a cucumber. It was 7s. 6d. – a week's wages! She went sadly away, but returned, only to be given the same answer. Mrs. Raffald was annoyed until she noticed that her would-be customer was pregnant. Immediately she understood "*called her back, gave her the longed-for dainty, and dismissed her, amidst expressions of the most fervent gratitude*".[5]

Joy Uings

Notes:

[1] Remains, Historical and Literary Chetham Society Volume 72.
[2] The Era, 30 August, 1857.
[3] The Manchester Times, 29 June, 1833.
[4] The Star, 15 August, 1885. No date is given for Dolfus' death and the story may well be apocryphal.
[5] Remains, Historical and Literary see [1] above

If you are planning on growing cucumbers this year, do let us know if you manage to beat this record set by John Fairclough of Poulton-le-Fylde. He'd been a gardener for sixty years, so had had a fair bit of experience.

On 24th April 1848 he sowed cucumber seed in a hot bed belonging to Mr. Bowness and on 25th May "*cut some remarkably fine fruit therefrom*".

The Blackburn Standard, 7 June 1848

Intrigued by Ann Brooks' piece on Elizabeth Gaskell House on pages 7-8? Want to know more? Look out for the next Events mailing, which will include an April visit, tour and talks about the restoration of the house and plans for the gardens. Anticipated date is Sunday 29th April, but this has yet to be confirmed.

John Edmondson is planning a book sale for the AGM – so don't forget cash or cheque-books! You can also help CGT funds by donating books for John to sell. John says "*books should be in good or better condition; on gardening, garden history and related subjects such as plant hunting and botanical illustration*". Your chance to make some space on your bookshelves for the new ones you buy at the AGM!

Send us your best garden photographs and get free entry to the Arley Garden Festival in June 2012 where you will see them on display

We are looking for photographs of a garden - or about gardens and gardening. Your pictures can be anything to do with gardens, as long as they are from Cheshire. The gardens can be public or private, large or small, formal or informal. The photographs can be about gardening – your grandfather's collection of gardening tools, a nicely- tended allotment, a prize-winning vegetable. The photographs don't even have to be taken in this year, but they should be fairly recent – ideally, no more than two years old.

There are two categories – under 16 and over 16.

Up to 3 photographs can be submitted - as digital images or prints. We want original, un-enhanced photographs only; your photograph should represent the scene as you saw it. We will not reproduce any images for commercial purposes but may wish to use them to promote the Cheshire Gardens Trust.

The closing date for entries is Monday 11 June 2012

Entries should be e-mailed to Helen Robinson at helen.robinson@arleyhallandgardens.com or posted 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.

Please give your age if you are under 16.

Also, please let us know when and where you took the photograph.

More information is on Arley's website: www.arleyhallandgardens.com.

Also at Arley:

Sunday 1 April – Spring Plant Fair
10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Children free: Adults £1.50 (redeemable against optional entry to The Gardens)
Specialist nurseries selling unusual plants plus trough planting demo by Arley Gardeners in Stable Yard

Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 April – Spring Walks
Carpets of bluebells and other wild flowers in the magnificent Big Wood, a part of the estate not normally open to the public. Enjoy the woods in their spring-time glory; listen to the glorious spring birdsong, walk by the lake and see many kinds of water birds; learn more about the history and agricultural estate.

More information at www.arleyhallandgardens.com/events

Did your Christmas presents include a fascinating book about gardens (or should that be a book about fascinating gardens)? Have you recently visited a garden you think others would like to hear about? Have you come across a snippet of garden history you'd like to share. Why not write something for the next edition of the newsletter…

Copy date for April newsletter is 31 March

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.