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# Newsletter

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## Some future events:

- ✿ Somerford (Knutsford) – Tuesday 9 August
- ✿ Study trip to Sweden – 1-6 September
- ✿ Revealing the Capability Brown Landscape at Trentham – Tuesday 20 September



Bolesworth Castle is set on a steep sandstone hillside, accessed by a gently rising woodland walk and overlooking spectacular views of the Cheshire plain, looking towards the Welsh Hills and Liverpool. It is a fabulous setting.

Diana Barbour, the present owner, was generous enough to open her gardens to us on 18<sup>th</sup> May. We were very lucky that the weather stayed kind to us as it was raining in much of the rest of Cheshire. More than forty of us gathered to look at the gardens and then picnic in the grounds. We enjoyed tea, coffee and biscuits in a lovely

room overlooking the terraces. Diana talked about the history of the family home. Bolesworth Castle was built in the 1820s by George Walmesley, a Liverpool businessman, whose family were wool merchants in Rochdale. Unfortunately the expense of the building work ruined him and eventually, in 1856, the estate was bought by Robert Barbour and it has remained in the same family ever since.

The present generation has lived there since 1988. In the early 1920s the house was remodelled by Clough Williams-Ellis (of

Portmeirion fame); he turned what once had been a rather dark house into a light and airy place, as well as making it more suitable for family life. He was also responsible for a number of the garden features; at this stage the terracing and steps below the house were built and the Temple of Diana (*below*) placed on the rise beside the drive.



Diana introduced Matthew Harris, estate manager of the Bolesworth Estate. When first purchased, the Estate was 2,000 acres, and has been steadily expanded by the family to just over 6,300 acres. It was, and still is, a traditional dairy farming estate, with 16 competent farmers. But there has been a lot of investment and a great deal of change.

The biggest change in the last 25 years was as a result of Anthony Barbour's vision to create a modern working environment on a traditional estate. Utilising former farm buildings and more recently building new, Bolesworth now has over 150 commercial lettings, employing over 1,000 people, in addition to residential housing.

There are numerous other business opportunities and activities. The Bolesworth International Equestrian event was only four weeks away; there is an ice cream farm, second only to Chester Zoo in terms of visitor numbers; a canal marina with pubs; and a vet. The BBC CarFest, for Children in Need, is coming soon.

Diana was thanked for her generosity in opening up her house and grounds to our group. She then led us out into the grounds and up to the Rock Garden, definitely the highlight of the visit.



The walks were laid out early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and planted up with *Rhododendron ponticum*, as were so many other gardens and estates in the north-west. Anthony Barbour's most important contribution to the garden was his 25 year-long planting scheme for this area.

He cut back the *Rhododendron ponticum* to rediscover the 2 levels of walks, joined together by the Lion and Lamb cave, and planted many *Rhododendron* species and hybrids.



*Just a few of the amazing colours among the Rhododendrons*

In addition he planted camellias, magnolias and *Prunus* for spring flowering, as well as *Sorbus*, maples and other specimen trees; in all 550 special trees, including 60 varieties of *Sorbus* and 40 varieties of *Acer*.

The results are stunning. Many visitors suggested that they had never before seen such a good display of rhododendrons and other spring flowering plants.

When Anthony Barbour died in 2007 the tenant farmers on the Bolesworth Estate presented the family with a beautiful curved wooden bench, which has been placed in a clearing above the Lion and Lamb. The views from there across to the house and the Welsh Hills beyond are also stunning.



*The view from above the Castle*

Just below the Rock Garden is a beautiful avenue of trees (beech, sweet chestnut) with bluebells still just in flower, and the Bridge Walk, leading down to the lake. There is a walk round the lake with wonderful views back to the house.

Around the house are terraces with beautifully planted borders containing a mixture of herbaceous perennials and shrubs.

In 1988, Dame Sylvia Crowe, then nearly 90, visited Bolesworth and gave advice on opening up the area immediately around the house.



More recently Arabella Hill has designed and replanted herbaceous and terrace borders. Immediately outside the house, the terrace and steps lead down to a stone bench. Along the walls leading down is glorious *Wisteria*.



*Wisteria in full bloom*

While the main herbaceous borders are waiting in the wings there was still some lovely planting, with *Iris*, *Ceanothus*, *Viburnum*, *Prunus* and a wonderful handkerchief tree in full bloom.



*The handkerchief tree (Davidia involuocrata) was a splendid sight*

Many of us took advantage of the still dry conditions to picnic in the grounds and enjoy the last views across the Cheshire plain.

Thank you Diana and family for a fabulous visit.

**Sue Eldridge**

*Photos courtesy of Margaret Blowey, Barbara Moth and Sue Eldridge*

## Caldwell's Nurserymen Customers

Over the past year our volunteers have been transcribing the Caldwell ledger from the 1830s and by the time you read this, we may well have finished the last few pages.

It has been fascinating, particularly compared with the first two, which dated from the 1790s. The number of new plants, the (often failed) attempts at getting the botanical spelling right, Caldwell's own varieties: this was a period when

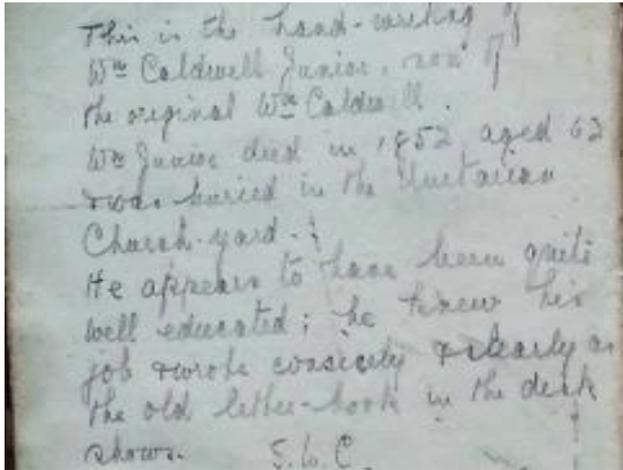
the nursery was doing well and customers were placing huge orders.

The ledger (numbered 363/10 if you want to have a look on the website) had a blank inside front cover until Sarah Winifred Caldwell (1881-1979) wrote a little note:

*"This is the hand-writing of Wm. Caldwell Junior, son of the original Wm. Caldwell. Wm. Junior died in 1852, aged 62 & was buried in the*

### Unitarian Church-yard.

*He appears to have been quite well educated; he knew his job & wrote concisely & clearly as the old letter-book in the desk shows. S.W.C."*



Our transcribers would probably not entirely agree with this last comment. The hand-writing, while looking nice, has been at times quite hard to read. However, it was the mention of the old letter-book which caught my attention. Had this been saved along with the ledgers? I emailed David Caldwell in Australia to see if he knew.

Although David had no knowledge of the letter-book, he did have one exciting piece of news. He had been contacted by a descendant of the first William Caldwell's older brother Thomas.

*"My great aunt Sarah Winifred always used to say that we 'originated' from nurserymen in Newry, Ulster. She was sort of half right as it turns out much to my amazement" he wrote.*

Apparently Thomas, having spent some time at both Knutsford and Knowsley, migrated to Northern Ireland with his wife and three of his sons. A surviving advertisement shows that his nursery was at Sheepbridge and that he delivered in Newry free of charge. Later they opened a seedshop in Newry, run by youngest son, Joseph. After Thomas' death the business continued to be run by his brother James Caldwell.

No doubt partly as a result of the Potato Famine, members of the family began emigrating to Australia, with James the last one to leave Ireland in 1852. They settled along the south-east coast, not far from Melbourne.

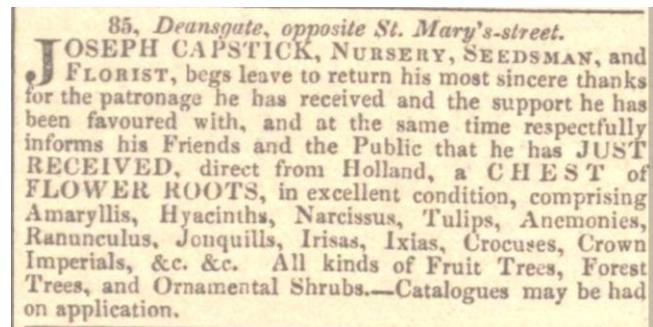
This was a fascinating aside given in my talk to CGT members in January, which was advertised as Caldwell's Nurserymen Customers. There were a lot of these and we continue to identify new ones. At the beginning of 2016, I had

counted a total of 58, most (41) within a 50-mile radius of Knutsford and a surprising 16 in the area now known as Greater Manchester. Or perhaps not so surprising, given my research of that area. Sometimes the ledgers tell us that the customer is a nurseryman or a gardener, but not always and so the information has to come from elsewhere. I recognised many names.

This is a large number for a talk, so I concentrated on just a few and considered why they were purchasing from Caldwells: did they want stock or stock plants? Had they got an order they couldn't fulfil? Or perhaps they just wanted plants for themselves. There were indications that any or all of these could have been true in different cases.

One person who purchased a great deal of stock from Caldwells was Joseph Capstick. In 1830 Capstick was at 85 Deansgate in Manchester where he described himself as a 'Nursery, Seedsman and Florist'.

Between July 1833 and February 1837 he placed more than 60 orders with Caldwells – seeds, herbaceous plants, fruit and forest trees. In just one order in October 1835 he bought 930 gooseberry bushes of different varieties (at less than 1d per bush) and 1,300 large trees (of four different types, costing altogether £6). Together with the price of carriage to Manchester (15 shillings), the whole order amounted to £10 9s. 0d.



*One of Joseph Capstick's adverts. From the Manchester Courier, 23 October 1830*

In all, his orders amounted to more than £150. But in 1838 he was declared bankrupt and when his hearing was reported in the papers it was stated that his case was a very bad one. He had made no attempt to pay any of his creditors, even though he had sold all his property. We can only hope that Caldwell's did not lose too much from this.

Some of Caldwell's nurserymen customers were in the area now covered by Greater London.

Hay, Anderson and Sangster were in Newington Butts (now Southwark). A lot of areas were known as Butts and were the places where traditionally men had practised archery (at one time this was a legal requirement).

In 1834 the company purchased 100 *Kalmia latifolia* from Caldwells; they cost a total of five guineas plus 1s. expenses; they were sent by canal and the crate they were packed in was to be returned. This would have been the period when the firm was successful, soon after John Sangster joined it (before then it had been known as Hay, Anderson & Co). In 1839 Sangster was one of the founding members of the Gardeners Royal Benevolent Society (now known as Perennial), subscribing 10 guineas. This turned out to be a good move. The firm declined and, in 1881, when Sangster died aged 84, he was in receipt of an annuity from the Society.

Not far from the Newington Butts was the firm of Messrs Buchanan at Camberwell. John Loudon gave a list of nurseries for young florists who wanted to start a collection of heaths – and Buchanan's headed that list. Loudon gave the names of 91 Ericas, so there were plenty to choose from; there are some 59 already on the Caldwell database, an indication of the plant's popularity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the north as well as the south.

Buchanan's purchased four different plants from Caldwells, two are still known by the same name: *Anemone narcissiflora* and *Lilium longiflorum*, but the names for the other two are synonyms. *Menziesia caerulea* is, today, an unresolved name, but John Loudon gives it as a synonym of *Phyllodoce taxifolia* which, in turn, is a synonym of *Phyllodoce caerulea*. The final plant, *Helonias asphodeloides* is now known as *Xerophyllum asphodeloides* (pictured below).



On the other side of London, in Brentford, there was the long-established firm of Ronalds & Son. It had been established by Hugh Ronalds, senior who had died in 1787. He was followed by Hugh Ronalds, junior (1759-1833) who was at the centre of the horticultural world, a member of the Horticultural Society of London (now the Royal Horticultural Society) and a friend of William Aiton (Director of Kew Gardens from 1759 to 1793). He was the author of *Pyrus Malus Brentfordiensis*, a culturally important record of apples which has been reprinted at an affordable price (if you want a first edition: there's one on ebay for £3,006!).

Ronalds bought a variety of plants including a Caldwell-raised *Dahlia* named 'Gloria Mundi' at a price of 3s 6d.

Dahlias had become the new 'florists' flower', with new cultivars appearing every year. In 1832 William Skirving (1793-1878), a nurseryman from Liverpool, exhibited 'Levick's Incomparable' at a Dahlia show in Hulme.



*Levick's Incomparable* was raised by James Levick, a florist in Sheffield

Skirving's name appears in many reports of flower shows where he was a consistent prize-winner. He placed a number of orders with the Knutsford nursery, two of which were entirely for herbaceous perennials.

Skirving owned the Walton Nursery where he had trial grounds and he became well-known for his Purple-top Yellow Turnip which grew to enormous size.

One story about Skirving is of particular interest.

British and American nurseries traded with each other and Skirving was well-known to Ellwanger & Barry, a large nursery in Rochester, New York.

A Mr Woodruff joined the gold-rush to the west coast in the early 1850s. He never found any gold, but he did find seeds of the *Wellingtonia gigantea* (now known as *Sequoiadendron giganteum*). He filled a snuff-box with them and sent them to Ellwanger & Barry who raised thousands of trees and shipped some to Britain.

One shipment went to Skirving's nursery. Skirving was ill in bed at the time, but his head gardener thought the new seedling trees so lovely he took them in to show his boss. "The very sight of them, Mr. Skirving declared, made him a well man again."<sup>1</sup>

I was very excited when I found the name of Thomas Bridgford in the ledger. You may remember the story of the Manchester nurseryman John Bridgford from an earlier talk.

A little digging revealed that Thomas was indeed John's son. Thomas had moved to Dublin where he spent 14 years as manager at Simpson's nursery before setting up on his own at the Spafield Nursery in Dublin.

Like his father he was keen on flowers and won various prizes. One of his sons, another Thomas, became an artist and was only 15 when he first exhibited at the Royal Hibernian Academy.

In 1836 Bridgford purchased two striped *Yucca filamentosa* and two *Manettia coccinea* from Caldwell.

### Joy Uings

<sup>1</sup> Ellwanger, William de Lancey: A Snuff-box Full of Trees, 1909.



*Manettia coccinea* as figured in *The Botanical Register*, 1823.

*Note:* The above was drawn from a plant growing at James Colvill's nursery in Chelsea although it had been raised at the Chelsea Physic Garden from seed received from Trinidad. It was described as exceeding "14 or 15 feet in length, and divided into numerous branches, twined together by their growth in the way of a rope, on which a multitude of short lateral flowerbearing branchlets appeared in succession for two months together or more".

By 1827 the plant was being included in Colvill's Catalogue in the first section 'Hothouse Climbers'.



*Joy receiving her award from Jonathan Pepler, Chair of Cheshire Local History Association, at the Association's AGM*

Carefully researched and written, and making full use of archival sources, Joy's article was awarded "the Cheshire Local History Association ... prize, named after Stephen Matthews a former Editor, for the best article in *Cheshire History*" in 2015! Well done Joy!

The Caldwell Project team have written various articles which have been published in *The Gardens Trust* news and yearbook, the *Plant Hunters Fair* and *Cheshire Gardens Trust* newsletter.

Joy Uings wrote an article titled "The Caldwell Ledgers: from Record Office to website" for the 2015 edition of *Cheshire History*. In the introduction Joy wrote:

"This article considers some aspects of the story of the nurseries as told through the archive, looks at the developments in business record-keeping between 1790 and 1920 and identifies the changing demand for plants and the economics of plant purchases in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries."

## The Trentham Estate – breathing new life into a historic landscape

2016 sees the nation reflecting on the remarkable legacy of Lancelot “Capability” Brown.

Described in 1772 by William Gilpin as “a scene of great simplicity and beauty”, the Trentham Estate in Staffordshire has shown how remarkably durable Brown’s work can be despite the ravages of the past 250 years.

When property developers, St. Modwen purchased the Trentham Estate from the National Coal Board in 1996 the estate was in a very sorry state. The Victorian balustrade lay in ruins, and the gravel terraces and walks had been covered in red potholed tarmac to better accommodate a major annual stage of the Lombard RAC Car Rally. The once magnificent floral displays had long since been grassed over. Most dramatically of all, deep seam coal mining, one mile below Brown’s lake had undermined it and caused it to empty, as well as triggering subsidence in the local area. The place had lost its spirit and its dignity.

The wider estate had also been neglected and disrespected. Brown’s open parkland, heathland and wood pasture had been colonised by Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and *Rhododendron ponticum*, whilst large commercial stands of coniferous forest had consumed Brown’s open parkland and obscured its historic rides and vistas; in essence, Trentham’s very setting had lost all legibility.

It took seven years and a public enquiry before planning was finally approved and the project to regenerate the historic estate commenced. Just 11 years later, the garden has become the BBC Countryfile Magazine’s Garden of the Year and received the European Garden Heritage Network Award for both its restoration and contemporary enhancement.

The revival of Trentham’s historic landscape has been carried out with huge understanding of the significance of its historic past, yet the team at Trentham have embraced change and moved the garden forward with wonderful contemporary plantings designed by Tom Stuart-Smith and Piet Oudolf.

Today, the site attracts an abundance of wildlife from otters and kingfisher splashing around on

the River Trent, to herons and cormorant nesting on the islands and red-necked grebe making a rare appearance on the lake. Up on Monument Hill, the Trentham herd of black fallow deer can be seen grazing, and rare breed Red Poll cattle graze in the park.

Brown’s work provides a perfect environment to encourage children away from their electrical devices and to provide safe places for them to venture out to explore and connect with nature.

Trentham offers a range of family activities such as den building, bush craft, learning to canoe on the lake, hiding from your siblings, enjoying the adventure playground or taking your shoes off and trying out Trentham’s Barefoot Walk with its range of textures, mud and cold water.

All of these experiences offer rich rewards, helping children to develop all sorts of life skills. The attractiveness to a child of getting wet and muddy is a natural desire and certainly helps them reconnect to nature and being outdoors.

Brownian landscapes have an abundance of ‘natural capital’, that is to say natural assets such as soil, air, water and all living things, which provide benefits to the environment and to the people and communities that enjoy them.

Brown’s historic landscapes have not only survived the past 250 years, but have thrived and continued to evolve into rich natural resources that today have become so valuable at a time when our native species are in serious decline.

Brown showed great adaptation in transforming his landscapes with great flexibility to meet the demands and requirements of the time. Now, while we can respect Brown’s achievement we can also enable his work to adapt and respond to current necessities and opportunities.

An area of the Trentham Estate was once stripped of its top soil and woodland and its natural gravels were used in the original construction of the M6 Motorway. Today this area is the focus of work to create a heathland - one of the most rapidly declining ecosystems in the UK, with almost a sixth of England’s heathlands lost since Brown’s time.

A great deal of work has been carried out at Trentham to reveal Brown’s lost landscape, the

parkland and the views and vistas that connected the house with the lake. This has helped enormously to recreate the 'setting' that appeared to have been lost with the demolition of Trentham Hall, the encroachment of forestry and the natural regeneration that engulfed so much of the parkland. Without 'setting' the experience is presented rather as a series of giant show gardens with little legibility or coherency.

Disease, changing climate, weather patterns, and the need to be financially sustainable must all be taken into consideration. Indeed, in some respects our landscapes are under much greater pressure than when Brown first visited.

Thankfully Trentham is in significantly better shape now than 130 years after Brown had completed his work, when pollution led Trentham's owners to leave the estate and demolish Trentham Hall.

The loss of elm from our landscapes is still a recent impact that has reshaped how our woods and avenues appear today; it seems clear that greater diversity and attention to biological security are new principles we must adopt if Trentham, like many estates is to respond to current threats and challenges which the landscape, ecology and visitor enjoyment depend upon.

A major progression of Trentham's ongoing regeneration, just last winter, revealed the lost connection between Brown's Deer Park and its backdrop of the rising woods of Kings Wood bank (SSSI). The Deer Park and lake are reconnected and provide the setting for Barry's 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian Garden, which replaced Brown's Pleasure Ground, lawn and bowling green. This must surely have been the simplicity that Gilpin was referring to, as Trentham is not a fussy landscape, ornamented by temples and grottos, but one that fully embraces its natural topography and the plentiful water sources that feed into it.

The insertion of the Italian Garden into the Brownian landscape was a decision of Trentham's Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. They enthusiastically and generously had long favoured Trentham's continued improvement in preference to one that looks to the past; Trentham has always been about doing both: this is its significance which must be carefully understood and used to help guide its future.

Key targets include the removal of large commercial stands of coniferous forestry and the thinning of unmanaged woodland; revealing and recreating lost parkland, wood pasture and heathland habitats; creating a Diamond Jubilee Wood; and major river re-profiling (moving some 14,500 tonnes of earth).

Along the way we have discovered a Georgian Ice House, created an environment for otters to return to the estate, rewetted a wetland and perhaps most importantly have discovered that most of Brown's work has actually survived! Trentham has always embraced change.

A substantial programme of conservation work is being undertaken to support the estate's rich ecological historic landscape. The most historic woodlands are designated as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI). Elsewhere acidic grassland, heathland, park, river and wetland habitats are all being actively managed and conserved for their unique significance.

Having revealed the connections between the lake, garden and river, we have engaged plantsman Nigel Dunnett from the University of Sheffield (of Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park fame), to add his signature to the woodland and meadows that were for so long hidden beneath a dense and dark jungle of *Rhododendron ponticum*.

Nigel has already introduced a sizeable annual meadow, which immediately and positively engaged visitors in the process of change.



Vast annual and perennial meadows and woodland plantings will add a fresh dimension to the newly revealed pasture edges along the lakeside and through the dappled shape of the historic woods. Large natural looking glades of shrubs and trees will add greater diversity and interest.

Our future vision includes adding a sequence of different spatial experiences through the woodland and around the lake with vast and contemporary meadow and woodland plantings by Nigel Dunnett.



This is not suburban gardening. This is on the scale of the Olympic Park planting, stretching into every corner of Trentham. This will be the biggest contemporary scheme of its type going on in any historic landscape in the UK.

Creative carvings, woven willow installations, giant [dandelion sculptures](#), and a [Fairy Trail](#), make the Estate a vibrant environment which encourages our visitors to connect with the landscape and bring its historical character to life in a way they can relate to.

In managing historic landscapes one must look back before moving forward. But this is about understanding your asset and the past should not dictate that restoration is the only option. We have benefited by working collaboratively with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England, English Heritage, our local authority, the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission and FERA who have provided a range of expertise and support we could not have accessed by working on our own.

Brown's lake is enjoyed by well over half a million visitors a year; it is the location for a beautiful fireworks display which is launched from punts on the water; it is the backdrop to a programme of musical performances throughout the summer; it is the home of Trentham Watersports Association with rowing, recreational canoeing, water polo, racing sprint/marathon kayaking, outrigger and fun Bell Boating and was graced with the Paralympic Torch and a host of past Olympians in 2012. So maybe the ability for Brown's legacy to pull together so many different people and organisations, some 250 years after

he finished at Trentham, is a further testament to how engaging his work truly has become.

If I was critical, perhaps Brown was a little harsh in his treatment of the historic avenues which radiated out from the house in a goose foot, as these could surely have been retained and would have enhanced the parkland we have today. However, Brown did retain a more historic avenue through the medieval copse, which he reinforced and overplanted. This shows that now and then he could flex, but I suspect held a very firm grip in delivering his principles.

My conclusion is that the legacy of Brown's work is much more complex than simply its historical significance. We must properly understand and manage his landscape accordingly, with a view to responding to challenges and opportunities to ensure it continues to offer rich and diverse benefits for at least the next 250 years.

Trentham Gardens has been appointed as one of the urban sites to participate in the Capability Brown Festival in 2016 and will develop and engage our audience in the biologically diverse and natural landscape in lots of simple but meaningful ways – with rich new meadow plantings and ecologically matched tree and shrub groupings.

We are working closely with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust to further develop and engage our audience with an emphasis on our connections with local schools, youth and special interest groups. We will participate in the celebrations at local and national level to reinforce the profile of an incredible range of other unique Brownian Landscapes throughout the county, the Midlands and across the country.

**Michael Walker**

**Foot notes:**

Jane Brown described Brown's work at Trentham in her book *the Omnipotent Magician: "Trentham's lake must rank as one of the finest examples of Lancelot's institution, his ability to endow a landscape with strength to withstand future times"*.

Brown connected the River Trent with the existing water to create a mile long lake with serpentine edges. He designed a new drive, which entered through a pair of lodges. The drive ran parallel to the lake through the ancient woodland before opening out into the deer park and arriving at the new hall, which he expanded and improved with Henry Holland.

Michael Walker's passionate description of the work undertaken at Trentham will no doubt enthuse members with a desire to see for themselves, so if you've not yet booked for our September visit, now is the time to do it. Hopefully the weather will be as wonderful as it was for our June event (*described below*).

## Summer Social & BBQ

Ed and Hilary Bennis hosted a very successful summer social in the form of a barbecue in their beautiful garden in Cheadle Hulme. Attended by twenty two members we enjoyed a veritable feast expertly cooked by Ed, the only one of the company who is 'licensed to grill'. The event raised funding towards a travel bursary for a student of garden related studies.

Many thanks to Ed and Hilary for their hospitality and hard work in preparing and hosting the event on the day, the members who helped out and finally whoever was in charge of the weather which was just perfect.

We hope that similar events may become a regular feature of our events programme. If any members have suggestions for activities, or are willing to host, please contact a member of the Events Group.

**Gwyneth Owen**



*Thanks to Ed (top) and Hilary (below) for allowing us to invade their home!*



## Cheshire Gardens Trust Exhibition at Reaseheath College in Nantwich

CGT has had an association with Reaseheath College for several years and a number of members have attended courses there.

On a fine Sunday in May 2016 we once again set up an exhibition at the college's Family Festival to promote the Trust displaying boards giving information on the work done by the Research Group and also the Caldwell Project.

Reaseheath is described as a land-based further education and higher education college: courses include Agriculture, Animal Management, Horticulture and Floristry. It is set in 330 hectares of farms, parkland, a lake, woodland and sports facilities. The campus is a fine example of an historic garden and designed landscape, which has been researched and recorded by members of CGT.



*Above: Sue Eldridge in declamatory mode*

The college is a national centre for Horticulture, the Environment and Sustainable Technology and our exhibition was housed in the new horticultural building alongside floristry and propagation. Visitors were interested to see the

new building and the extensive commercial glasshouse and to buy plants which had been sown and propagated by the students. A good number showed interest in the exhibition, especially staff and students from the college. The day must have been a success for

Reaseheath as other areas were very crowded and noisy as families enjoyed the many activities on offer, including dog shows and tractor rides. We were pleased to be housed in a slightly quieter area where we were made very welcome by college staff.

**Janet Horne**

## T is for Topiary

If you were asked to give examples of what the Romans gave us, you would probably mention straight roads, central heating and bath houses. But would you include topiary?

In Roman gardens the staff were generally named after the role they performed, so the *topiarius* was originally employed to clip hedges and maintain the pleasure gardens. The term also appears when referring to a landscape gardener, i.e. a person who created *opus topiarium*.<sup>1</sup>

Fishbourne Royal Palace in Chichester, West Sussex, is an early example of a grand Roman construction and a model showing what it may have looked like includes clipped hedges and shrubs.

Topiary is the art of training plants (typically evergreen shrubs and trees) into intricate or stylized shapes and forms. It includes parterres, mazes and labyrinths, and knot gardens. Typically box (*Buxus sempervirens*) and yew (*Taxus baccata*) are used. However, other evergreens such as privet (*Ligustrum japonicum*), holly (e.g. *Ilex aquifolium*) and *Lonicera nitida* can be used.<sup>2</sup>

You may be familiar with the topiary at Levens Hall which dates back to the 1690s.<sup>3</sup> Some of the trees are 300 years old and the whole garden survived changes in gardening style over the centuries.

Closer to home, Arley Hall has its own topiary and those of us who visited the East Garden in 2014 will probably remember the examples in these photographs (*right top and middle*).

In the herbaceous borders garden, open to the public, topiary may also be seen, as in this photo by Barbara Moth (*bottom right*).

Topiary does not appear to have waned in popularity and there are many present-day examples to be seen. Anyone who watches *Gardeners' World* will know that Monty Don is currently creating a topiary of one of his dogs, Nigel. And a quick look at topiary images on the Internet will reveal an amazing array of what can be achieved with a bit of imagination and clipping. My favourite has to be the herd of elephants strolling across a lawn. If you have access to the Internet, key in 'topiary' in your search engine and select images. There are some incredible designs.



**Julia Whitfield**

<sup>1</sup> Farrar, L. 1998. *Ancient Roman Gardens*. Sutton Publishing Ltd, 161

<sup>2</sup> Website: [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk) <sup>3</sup> Website: [www.levenshall.co.uk](http://www.levenshall.co.uk)

## Clibran's Nursery, Altrincham

Improvements in transport in the Altrincham area from the late eighteenth century began with the building of the Bridgewater Canal. This, together with the development of toll roads, and then the building of railways, encouraged the growth of the town and by the mid-19th century it was well served by nurseries.

Clibran's Nursery was well-established in 1870 when it placed advertisements in *The Journal of Horticulture*. At that time it was based in Partington, later moving to Oldfield in Altrincham. In 1902 it moved to Bank Hall Lane in Hale, near the gas works, where water was pumped from the River Bollin by a windmill. Gradually other land in Hale, Timperley and Ashley was purchased. In Frampton Road, Hale, there were greenhouses for half-hardy plants, while at Green Lane, Timperley, there was a Forestry Department and a Farm seeds section. Clibran's wide range of catalogues have become collectors' items.

William Clibran & Sons became one of the largest horticultural firms in the country. They introduced many new plants produced by themselves or gardeners in Cheshire. 'Sure Crop' Apples originated at Clibran's in 1905, and other apples available were 'Millicent Barnes', 'Lord Clyde', 'Lord Derby' and 'Elton Beauty'.

Damson 'Cheshire Prune' is possibly the 'Cheshire Damson', still available and there was 'Timperley' rhubarb. Among the tomatoes was 'Clibran's Victory'.

For gardeners, the company specialized in bedding and herbaceous plants. Among the flowers produced was *Begonia* 'Clibran's Pink', *Lobelia* 'Mrs Clibran', and *Aubrieta* 'Dr Mules'.

There were shops at Stamford New Road, Altrincham and 10/12 Market Street, Manchester. Things did not always run smoothly however, for on 9th February 1914, *The Manchester Evening News* reported that 200 men employed at Clibran's had gone on strike over the dismissal of men who belonged to the Workers Union, and who had campaigned over wages and hours.

Concerns over the effect of gas from the Gasworks caused the company to rent Birkin Farm, Ashley, from Lord Egerton, where in addition to the usual nurseries, there was an American department. Coppice Farm, Ashley,

was also rented from the Tatton Park estate from 1937. Clibran's closed their operations at Coppice in 1967, but the Newton family continued to run it as a nursery until the late 1990s.

An undated letter applying for a Royal Warrant\* says that the company had supplied trees to Sandringham for 10 years, and also to the royal forests. It goes on to say the firm occupied 400 acres of nursery land with 5 acres of glass houses, and employed over 350 hands.

Clibran's Rose Nursery opened at Timperley in 1957. In 1975 the nursery was purchased by Peter Yates who developed the business into a popular garden centre, before it was acquired by Wyevale in 1996.

The group closed in 1968 after the death of Mr W. R. Clibran in 1964. Much of the land formerly occupied by the business has now been built over, and this important company has largely been forgotten.

**John Davies**

\* Illustrated in 'Hale and Around: Its past in pictures' Hale Civic Society. 1976.

A Collection of Clibran's Catalogues 1907-1964 can be seen at

<https://archive.org/search.php?query=Clibrans>

**Hazel Pryor**, from Timperley, is researching Clibran's in detail, and would welcome information on any personal memories, photographs or memorabilia. Email: [hpryor@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:hpryor@tiscali.co.uk). She adds: Clibran's also introduced the 'Altrincham Sycamore' or 'Altrincham Acer' (*Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Brilliantissimum') a small tree, very distinctive in spring for its leaf colour (see below). It soon fades to yellowy green; it can be easily spotted in April/May in many front gardens.



## Digging Worsley New Hall

The plans to turn the Worsley New Hall grounds into a fifth RHS garden – RHS Bridgewater – are probably well known by now. We still have to wait three years for its opening, but meanwhile Sue Bartlett attended a talk about recent archaeological work on the long-lost Worsley New Hall.

It began in 2011. Desk-top research was followed by a look on site when it was discovered that the basement of the hall remained virtually intact. Then in May and June 2012 local schools and community groups were invited to take part in the excavation of the site. On 6 April this year Dr Mike Nevell, the Archaeologist from Salford University gave the talk that Sue attended.

The Worsley estate dates back more than 800 years and the Old Hall around 400 years. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Worsley was the home of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Duke of Bridgewater – of Bridgewater Canal fame. Before he succeeded to the title he was Lord Francis Egerton. He died childless and the estate passed eventually to Francis Leveson-Gower, younger son of the Marquis of Stafford of Trentham (this was before the Marquis was upgraded in 1833 to Duke of Sutherland). Leveson-Gower changed his name to Egerton and this new Lord Francis Egerton would become the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Ellesmere in 1846.

Ellesmere left the Old Hall standing, but had another one (built in the 1760s) demolished in 1844-45. He replaced it with Worsley New Hall, designed by Edward Blore in Elizabethan gothic style. The house cost £100,000 (equivalent to £6.7m today) and was one of Blore's largest and grandest houses. Following its completion, William Andrews Nesfield was employed to lay out the gardens.

In 1851 the house was visited by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and several decades later by Edward VII. But the Hall's setting was no longer as salubrious as it once was and it was eventually left empty. In September 1943 a fire, believed to have been started by boys, destroyed the roof and the top two floors. In 1946 the remains were demolished and the gardens were lost. However, not everything disappeared.

The archaeological dig concentrated on the house foundations. In the double height vaulted cellars very early (1840s) air circulation heating

ducts were found and the mechanism for a very early (1908) Otis lift [one of the amateur archaeologists was a retired Otis lift engineer!] The upper cellar was for storage and the lower built for structural stability. It is understood that the family's experience of coal mining (over 50 miles of underground canals serving the mines) informed the stabilisation of the 4/5 storey house.

The excavation trenches have now been backfilled.

Still existing in the grounds are: a Gothic-style Garden Cottage, designed by Blore; the remains of the walled kitchen garden with heated walls (the Trentham wall case design); a bothy to house between 8 and 12 gardeners (built 1870s, enlarged 1900s); a boiler house and decorative chimney (again designed by Blore); barns and stables, a grotto and a 'cup and dome' ice house built to a standard 1840s design (designer unknown). It is one of the largest remaining and includes a stone clad entrance.

The kitchen garden covered ten acres, terraced into the hillside with a short access tunnel. It was one of the largest Victorian walled gardens and had a vinery and melon and cucumber pits. A Peach House and Camellia House had their own boiler.

To the front of the remains of the house are three terraces (there were originally six). The parterre on the 2nd terrace was a direct replica of a published design by the French landscape architect Dezallier d'Argenville.



This picture from the RHS website, originally appeared in *The Gardens of England* by Edward Adveno Brooke (published 1856-7). It shows a number of fountains. These were gravity fed from Blackleach Reservoir and then drained into the lake. The base of the large hexagonal fountain (the Great Fountain) and two others smaller fountains were found.

At the centre of the second terrace was a bronze fountain of a Spanish design by the French company Val d'Osne, originally exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851.

There were stone steps and balustrades, but the existence (or otherwise) of their remains will only be determined once the regenerated woodland has been cleared. Beyond the formal garden were the landscaped parkland and a lake. In 1848 a stone grotto/folly was built on an island accessed by a footbridge. The lake was enlarged by 1875 but is now 50% silted up.

The double cast iron entrance gates (which were shown at The Great Exhibition of 1851) still stand.

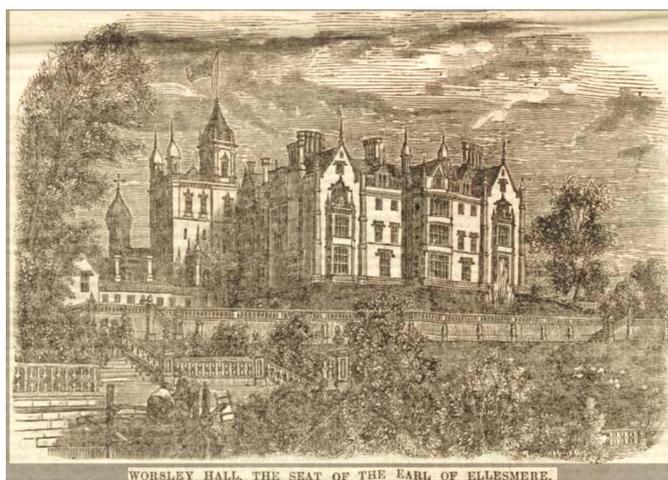
This is a very brief summary of the archaeological work that was undertaken. More information, together with photos old and new can be found at [www.salford.ac.uk/library/archives-and-special-collections/worsley/Archaeology](http://www.salford.ac.uk/library/archives-and-special-collections/worsley/Archaeology), where there are a number of pdfs covering different parts of the gardens.

In 1851, when Queen Victoria visited the north-west, the newspapers provided readers with a great deal of information about the places she stayed, one of which was Worsley New Hall. It was well placed on rising ground and facing south with views over Cheshire to Shropshire and Derbyshire – although surprisingly Bowdon Church was hidden from view. The *Manchester Courier* included a line drawing of the house and terraces. (right)

It described this area: “A terrace of considerable height and breadth surrounds the east and west sides and the south front, enclosed by a bold parapet, solid at the sides, but pierced in that portion of the front which is equal in length to the three bays. There is very little decoration on the terrace beyond a small fountain fed from the lands above, and some few ornamental beds...

“The pleasure grounds are not very extensive,

*nor do they present much scope for a detailed notice. The carriage drive from the road to the village is cut on the slope and the upper portion of the latter is nicely thrown into two or three terraces... The branch canal to Leigh is the extreme boundary to the south and between it and the hall front a part of the ground in summer and autumn is a perfect wilderness of fragrant flowering creepers and plants, such as sweet peas, mignonette, or towering hollyhocks, dahlias growing amid such an immense variety of bedding plants, that a seedsman's catalogue would alone enable us to record their names. The larger plants, when we saw them, were so disposed as to form alleys along the walks, and turning into one path the sense of smell was refreshed and pleased by a perfume made up of the combined scents of the sweet pea and the lowly mignonette; in another the gorgeous hues of the dahlia could alone be seen, while along the third a belt of hollyhocks reared their tall tapering forms high above our heads, inviting a close inspection of their beauties. Before these make their appearance the view from the terrace is upon plots occupied by large laurels, rhododendrons, and that class of hardy shrubs, intersected by devious walks of considerable length, and the intention would almost seem to be to raise a small shrubbery.”*



There was a great deal more information about the area apparently on the basis that, although the writer did not know whether Her Majesty had visited particular sites, she may have done so!

**Sue Bartlett/Joy Uings**



The late King, early after his accession, evinced a strong predilection for civil architecture, and ornamental gardening... [he] dislike(d) the stately unvaried flatness of Hampton Court. He offered, indeed, to submit its artificial gardens to the mercy of the famous Capability Brown; but the latter declined doing any thing with them, except letting the trees grow more in their natural way.

**Manchester Mercury - Tuesday 22 February 1820**

## Grow your own garden party

The CGT 'Show Team' have been hard at work again with displays at both The Royal Cheshire County Show and the Arley Garden Festival in June. Committee members Ruth Brown (horticulture), Vivien Hainsworth (nurseryperson) and Christine Wilcox-Baker (artist) masterminded the exhibits.



*Ruth and Vivien ready to answer questions*

This year's theme was 'Grow your own garden party'. Not to be outdone by The Queen's birthday celebrations we decided to have our own. Lord Ashbrook, of Arley Hall and Gardens, is our fantastic patron and we decided we would help celebrate his 80th birthday year.

Our displays included many growing 'ingredients' of a sumptuous garden party picnic and also celebrated the delights of cultivating your own food. From salads and sauces to cordials and quiches we had a wide array of edible plant 'ingredients' and even included many beautiful edible flowers.

Adding to the edibles on our display, Lady Ashbrook contributed a bottle of her home made elderflower cordial and Lady Grey kindly donated Joey's Jolly Good Jam, Mum's



*Picnic tables set outside the tent at Arley Garden Festival*

Marvellous Marmalade and High Legh Heavenly Honey. Vivien made a beautiful medieval Tussy Mussy, Ruth kept all in check with her horticultural expertise and Christine made a herb 'birthday cake' to complete the celebratory theme.

We were delighted with the response and even achieved a 'highly commended' rosette at The Royal Cheshire County Show – all the more exciting as we hadn't actually realised we were being judged. We received lots of visitors and talked to several potential new members. At the Arley Garden Festival Christine was interviewed about the CGT live on BBC Radio Manchester.



*An unusual birthday cake! The '80' is picked out in chive flowers.*

More photos at [www.cheshire-gardens-trust-org.uk](http://www.cheshire-gardens-trust-org.uk).

The Gardens Trust has finalised a document *The Planning System in England and the Protection of Historic Parks and Gardens* which is being sent to all Planning Authorities in England and Wales. Copies are available on [www.thegardenstrust.org/planning-leaflet](http://www.thegardenstrust.org/planning-leaflet). If you have always wondered what this part of the Trust's work is all about, then The Gardens Trust is planning an event just for you. It will be held on Thursday October 20th 2016, at Westonbirt School near Tetbury in Gloucestershire. These Grade I gardens are generally difficult to visit so this is a great opportunity to see them.

## New Membership Secretary

We are pleased to announce that we have a new Membership Secretary.

Crispin Spencer lives in Cheshire, though he works in Lancashire. He is the Head Gardener at Claughton Hall Estate, near Garstang and, although this means he can rarely join in our events, he is keen to promote the Trust and help with the workload.

He also co-ordinates the WRAGS (Work and Retrain As a Gardener Scheme) of the Women's Farm and Garden Association.

I had to admit I had not heard of the WFGA, despite the fact that it predates all of us. It was founded in 1899. Gertrude Jekyll was a member though I am ashamed to say that other names included in their brochure were unknown to me until I searched the internet: Katherine Courtauld (a renowned fruit grower and farmer), Fanny Wilkinson (landscape gardener and horticultural teacher) and Louisa Wilkins (pioneer of the smallholdings movement) were just three.

The Women's Land Army in the First World War started as a WFGA initiative as the Women's National Land Service Corps. It was originally

met with opposition, but grew in size.

Meriel Talbot, another early member of the WFGA, was employed at the Board of Agriculture and in 1917 she was put in charge of the newly formed Women's Branch where she could set up a national Women's Land Army.

There have been many other initiatives including WRAGS. This offers an opportunity to train part time in practical gardening skills in a working garden as part of a gardening team or with an experienced garden owner.

Crispin says: *"I help coordinate the scheme in Lancashire and Cumbria, but I'm hoping they will let me have Cheshire too. As such I am looking for gardens, of any size, who could employ a trainee for 15 hours a week for a year."*

So if you have a garden that you think might fit the bill, do get in touch with Crispin. His email address is [crispin.spencer@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:crispin.spencer@hotmail.co.uk) or you can phone him on 01995 643318.

For garden owners looking for gardeners, there is now the Garden Recruitment Network.

See <http://www.wfga.org.uk/why-join-us/garden-recruitment-network.html>.

### Cheshire History Day

The Cheshire Local History Association organises this annual event and this year it will be held on 29 October at the new Memorial Court in Northwich. This year's topic will be 'Industrial Cheshire'.

The day starts at 9:15 with registration and coffee to help wake you up. There will be five talks, three in the morning and two in the afternoon with a break for lunch at 13:00. Subjects include: Coal-mining in East Cheshire: aspects of social and landscape history; The East Cheshire Silk Industry with particular reference to Macclesfield; keystones of the Cheshire Chemical Industry: salt, coal and salt infrastructure; Films from the North West Film Archive; The History of the Anderton Boat Lift.

There are always a large number of stalls with displays and items for sale. Booking forms will be available in due course from [www.cheshirehistory.org.uk](http://www.cheshirehistory.org.uk). CGT always has a stand, so if you are planning on going and would like to take a turn to talk to people about what we do, contact Freyda Taylor (email: [taylor1157@btinternet.com](mailto:taylor1157@btinternet.com); tel: 01829 733870).

And even if you can't make it, check out the website to see if there is a local history society near you. If you are wondering about something in your locality you can post on Notes and Queries or possibly answer someone else's question.

**Copy date for October newsletter is 30 September**

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: 07900 968 178 or e-mail [joy.uings@btconnect.com](mailto:joy.uings@btconnect.com).