

Patron: The Viscount Ashbrook

Contents:

- Birkenhead Park
- Fletcher Moss Gardens
- Trentham Gardens
- How to create a walled garden

Some future events:

- The National Wildflower Centre, Thursday 15 June
- Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire, Wednesday 12 July
- Walkden Gardens, Sale, Wednesday 9 August (evening)

In the January newsletter, we carried a letter from Ian Trickett of Trafford Borough Council about three parks/gardens. Ian is looking for help in researching their background. In this edition we look at Denzell Gardens. The next edition will feature Stamford Park and in October we will look at Halecroft Park.



If you have driven down the A56 from Manchester, through Altrincham, just before you reach Dunham Massey, you may have noticed on your left a walled gateway bearing the legend "Denzell House and Gardens". What you may not have realised is that, although the house is privately occupied as offices, the gardens are in public ownership and you are welcome to drive in, park and wander around.

The site in its current form dates from 1874 when Robert Scott paid £7,075 for ten acres of land. Scott made his money from Cotton, spending 68 years

working for Tootall Broadhurst Lee & Co Ltd. Having bought the land, he employed Manchester architects, Clegg and Knowles, to design the house.

We don't know what the garden was like in Scott's time, although the 1891 census shows that he had a Gardener, living with his family in the Lodge (demolished in 1970).

After Scott died in 1904, the house and grounds were bought by Samuel Lamb. Lamb was a partner in Coddington and Lamb of Peter Street, Manchester.

Cont./

Under Lamb, the gardens flourished. There were hot houses with vines, orchids and peaches. The sunken garden contained a lily pond and was beautifully stocked with flowers and shrubs. The landscaping had strong Italianate influences. For leisure, there were tennis courts and a croquet lawn.

Alongside the west boundary, earth mounding and planting of shrubs hid the house from the main road – and today cuts off the sound of the traffic.

Sixteen gardeners tended the grounds. There were garden fetes in aid of charity and the grounds were open to the public most weekends during the summer.



The courtyard was surrounded by greenhouses which were still in use in the 1970s. They included a temperate house, a cool/cold house, a plunge house and even an upper greenhouse on the roof above the old garage. Plants were grown for functions at the Assembly Rooms and Altrincham Town Hall.

After Lamb died in 1936, the house and gardens were given to the local authority and in the intervening 70 years there have been many changes, but the sunken garden, Italianate pond and rhododendron walks have all survived. There is also a tree collection, currently being surveyed with the intention of providing a tree guide.

Joy Uings

If you have any memories of Denzell Gardens – maybe even a photograph – why not let us know?

Birkenhead Park restoration is well under way.....

Birkenhead Park is the only designed landscape in the historic county of Cheshire to have been awarded a Grade 1 listing by English Heritage.

It is now experiencing a long-awaited renaissance, funded through grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the European Regional Development Fund and Wirral Borough Council's capital programme.

History

The park's original designer was Joseph Paxton, head gardener to the Duke of Devonshire at Chatsworth and later the architect of the Great Exhibition's Crystal Palace in Hyde Park. He was assisted by a young Liverpool architect, Lewis Hornblower, who designed the boathouse, bridges, railings and gates. Paxton was quoted as stating that the Grand Entrance Lodge was 'out of scale'.

Hornblower went on to win a competition for the design of Sefton Park in Liverpool. The superintendent of construction was Edward Kemp, who had trained at Chatsworth and was appointed in 1843, later becoming Park Superintendent. He too became a landscape architect, and was responsible for laying out Stanley Park in Liverpool.

Birkenhead Park opened on 5 April 1847 to great acclaim. Its fame was secured when an American, Frederick Olmsted, visited Birkenhead in 1850. He was inspired to design New York's Central Park, which incorporates several of Paxton's original concepts.

Birkenhead was Britain's first park to be created by a municipal authority, and its construction marked the beginning of a rapid expansion of urban open spaces during the later Victorian era.

Decline

Sadly, in more recent years the infrastructure has suffered from insufficient maintenance – drains became blocked, buildings vandalised. It was designated a Conservation Area in 1977 and some efforts were made to mitigate the damage. But it was clear that only a massive restoration scheme could bring back its former glory. Its ability to attract wildlife was part of the problem: grey squirrels attacked the bark of the trees, and Canada Geese churned up the banks of the lakes.

Restoration

The five-year £14m project to restore the park started in 2003. It involves the restoration of the Grand

Entrance Lodge; draining, edging and relining of the lakes; refurbishment of heritage fencing and repairs to the Roman boathouse, rustic bridges, mounds and rockwork.



The Swiss Bridge is to be restored and connected to the mainland. This will provide circular walks across three bridges to the island as originally designed.

A new Park Pavilion has already been completed. It includes a café, exhibition gallery, education centre and accommodation for park staff. The park's 226 acres incorporate a number of sports facilities. A new cricket pavilion and terracing will be built as part of Phase 4.

The redevelopment work is being co-ordinated by Bucknall Austin, who were awarded a contract by the HLF to monitor and advise on the restoration and develop a management plan for its future maintenance. Project managers and quantity surveyors for the design team are Turner Townsend, and Ainsley Gommon designed the new Pavilion.

To assist the smooth running of the project, much of the Park has been closed during weekdays over the winter, but it has remained open at weekends.

Drainage work was carried out at an early stage in the scheme, as the site is low-lying and prone to becoming waterlogged. Although there has been a lot of progress, many of the buildings remain shrouded in scaffolding, but the appearance of smart new railings and a stylish Pavilion hold out the promise of some high-quality recreational spaces.



After completion, connoisseurs of Victorian Parks and local people alike (some may be both) will find it hugely enjoyable.

By making the Park the focus for many activities and events, and sustaining a high level of preventative maintenance, Wirral Borough Council will once more have an attraction that can reinforce their claim as the "Leisure Peninsula".

John Edmondson

Pictures: above left, draining the pond; above the Grand Entrance Lodge and new railings; below the new Park Pavilion



Friends of Fletcher Moss Gardens

A group of local residents met on 15th March 2006 to form **Friends of Fletcher Moss Gardens** whose aim is to care for and improve the botanical gardens and surrounding parkland. If you would like to find out more about the group please contact the Acting Chairman. Alan Hill, 15 Merston Drive, East Didsbury, Manchester M20 5NT Tel 0161 445 1535 e-mail awhill@globalnet.com

Further information on the various Friends of Parks groups is also given on Manchester City Council's website www.manchester.gov.uk/leisure/parks.

Fletcher Moss Gardens

The heart of a busy Manchester suburb is probably the last place to think of looking for a well-kept, publicly-owned garden. Fletcher Moss is the exception to this rule. Lying, as it does, in the centre of Didsbury, a couple of steps from a busy main road brings a change as extreme as that from the back of a wardrobe into Narnia.

Donated to the City of Manchester in 1919 by Alderman Fletcher Moss who bought the property in 1912, the garden retains much of its original character.

A large rockery, originally created in 1889 by Robert Wood-Williamson, provides a south-facing environment, which supports a bewildering variety of pines, shrubs and conifers. Small waterfalls meander among the rocks, making their way down to a natural pond, which reflects a tulip tree, walnut and swamp cypress.

The impressive house overlooks the rockery like a benevolent grandfather. It was built around 1795 and staked its own claim to a place in history.

Robert's wife, Emily, was disturbed by the way in which some bird species were becoming extinct due to their use in the making of women's hats, so formed the Plumage League to combat the problem. This evolved into the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

The house is now divided into private living quarters, gardeners' mess rooms, tool store, visitor centre, office and café.

Subtending the rockery is a grass tennis court and beyond this, a damp meadow leads the walker alongside Stenner Wood to the banks of the River Mersey. The meadow is being developed from what was once a traditionally mown area of short grass into an example of native wetland. School groups take part in warden-led plantings of marginal species and a limited mowing regime ensures that only closely cut paths offer the length of sward normally encountered in city parks.

The Old Parsonage, where Fletcher Moss once lived, is reached by leaving the rockery area and crossing Stenner Lane at its junction with Wilmslow Road. Adjacent to the Old Cock pub, a gateway, topped by a stone eagle, leads into a garden with an air of monastic serenity.

Just inside the gate an old mulberry tree presides over a haphazard assortment of bulbs and *Skimmia reevesiana*, while overhead a lime tree immediately flanking the gate supports a healthy growth of mistletoe – a relative rarity in the Manchester area. Originally an ancient apple tree further into the gardens played host to mistletoe, and when it died, around 2001, it was thought that the semi-parasite was lost to the area. These thoughts were confounded when it appeared in the lime already mentioned and also in two similar trees a few yards apart – one next to St. James's Church and the other just inside the Wilmslow Road entrance to the park proper.

The *Trachycarpus fortunei* specimens fronting the Parsonage are recognised for their hardiness in this

country. What had not previously been encountered at Fletcher Moss was an ability for them to produce seeds which germinate and grow in situ, without the protection of a greenhouse and supplementary heating. This they now regularly do, but whether as an example of the effects of global warming or simply a coming of age of the trees is open to speculation.

Two impressive cedars front the Parsonage, together with a mature *Cornus kousa chinensis* and a weeping ash reputedly planted by Sam Newall in 1773. The *Cornus* has an intermittent flowering habit, some years breathtaking in abundance and, in others, barely noticeable. It epitomises that unpredictability in gardening which is part of its subtle fascination.

Disappointingly, the Parsonage itself is used as an office by the Housing Department and is not open to the public. However it performs the function of providing shelter to the gardens, and picturesquely supplements the south-facing outlook to present an area where plants generally considered less hardy can thrive.

Beyond the Parsonage lies a square lawn dotted with specimen trees and shrubs and edged on two sides by herbaceous borders. Notable among the trees are *Eucryphia x nymansensis* 'Nymansay', *Laburnocytisus adami*, *Oxydendrum arboreum* and *Liquidambar styraciflua*. The autumn colour of the latter two, combined with a purple *Cotinus* and the shrubby *Euonymus alatus*, cause the fireworks of bonfire night to pale into insignificance by comparison.

On the north side of this tree lawn is a large glasshouse. Once the home of an impressive collection of orchids, the failure of the heating system, combined with a lack of council funds, caused it to become unused. Now however it has been converted to become an ideal home for an alpine collection – this having the obvious advantage of not requiring any heat. The house is open to the public only when a gardener is working in the vicinity, due to some unfortunate thefts of plants. However, anyone keen to look around can obtain the key from the manager in the office adjacent the rockery.

Although Fletcher Moss is classed as a city park, it differs from most in that its aims are to be aesthetically pleasing, educational and peaceful – this latter factor is achieved partially by a lack of playgrounds and sporting facilities, the only concession to this being the tennis courts.

Like any good garden, it has something to offer at all times of year: the attractions of alpines and bulbs in the spring are reflected by the blaze of foliage colour in autumn, the herbaceous plants in summer, the heathers and winter – flowering shrubs in the darkest days and the two pubs by the gate.

John Steedman
Assistant Park Manager,
Fletcher Moss Gardens

Trentham Gardens

The Events Committee is planning a visit to Trentham Gardens in July. In 2002 I visited Trentham. It was in sad decline. Since then a £100m restoration project has been undertaken. I can't wait to see the difference it has made.

Trentham's history dates back to Saxon times. Charles Bridgeman created a garden there and Capability Brown landscaped the park.

In 1843 the 2nd Duke of Sutherland employed Charles Barry to re-design the house and replace Brown's characteristic sweeping lawns.

What the Duke wanted was an Italian style garden. As you know, Italian style means lots of long staircases between balustraded terraces.

Height is what you need to do justice to the Italian style. A hill-side is ideal. Trentham is almost perfectly flat.

John Loudon had written: "We could not help doubting whether even Mr. Barry could make anything of this great dull flat place, with its immense mansion, as tame and spiritless as the ground on which it stands" but, having seen the plans "Let no man hence-forth ever despair of a dead flat."

Just seven steps led from the house to the upper terrace and from there a further six wide, but shallow steps swept in a semi-circle to the great parterre. A central gravelled path led down to the lake. The terrace walls were barely chest high, but the house was set well back from the lake, so the length of the parterres more than compensated.

Although Barry gave the garden its structure, its fame in Victorian times was due to George Fleming, the head gardener. It was Fleming who popularised bedding – the quintessential Victorian gardening style – and it was at Trentham that he showed his genius.

Not that it was easy. *The Cottage Gardener* ran a profile on Fleming. He



Above: Shrubland park in Suffolk 'Inferior in extent to the work at Trentham, it presented greater capabilities, and was more perfect in result'.

Below: Trentham Park



The semi-circular steps: above in 1858, below in 2002



Above: the statueless plinths

was described as 'often on the verge of despair'. The ground was water-logged; drainage had to be installed; the River Trent had to be diverted to prevent the lake silting up.

Fleming's bedding designs were kept for this part of the garden. Around it was 500 acres where Fleming planted shrubberies and an arboretum.

Together, Barry and Fleming created a magnificent garden. Perhaps inevitably, decline set in. The house was demolished in 1912. Without the house, how could the garden survive. Yet ninety years on, the beauty that had once been could still be vaguely discerned.

The shallow steps remained, but the balustrading needed protection.

The plinths were in place, but the statues had long since disappeared.

I spoke to Rob Bailey who had been looking after the gardens for 19 years. He started as one member of a team of 36. By 2002 there was just Rob and one other. He said 'its like looking after a very elderly gentleman'. Each day brought a new problem and a new 'make-do': a column split and was fastened with a brace; a crack appeared in a fibreglass statue – it was encased in plywood so it got no worse; balustrading was fenced off to prevent further damage.

It took five years to get planning permission for the re-development. The local people were not keen. They have known and loved the garden for many years, but in its then-present sad state and not as the showcase it once was. They were afraid they would be losing a much-used amenity.

Since 2002 the gardens have been transformed. Tom Stuart-Smith and Piet Oudolf have been employed to work their magic.

Would George Fleming approve?

Joy Uings

How To Create A Walled Garden

Nowadays we are concentrating on preserving outstanding walled gardens, but try to imagine what it was like when they were first being built. How should you orientate your walled garden? What should you plant?

The anxious gardener could turn to “Spectacle de la Nature: or, Nature Display’d, being Discourses on such particulars of Natural History as were thought most proper to excite the curiosity and form the minds of youth.” This four-volume work was translated from the French by Mr Humphreys and was evidently successful, because it had reached a sixth edition in 1743. Even though it is aimed at the young, mature gardeners could benefit from reading it.

The book takes the form of a dialogue between a Chevalier and a Prior, and the Prior points out that the first requirement is to site your garden on a good soil, and then to protect it from damaging winds.

“The breath of the north-west is not as destructive as that of the north-east wind, but it checks every plant that begins to bloom, and its discontinuance is frequently preceded by a tempest of hail, which in a few moments lays waste all the luxuriant promises of the spring. ... A kitchen-garden may be defended from the insults of those winds that are most to be feared; either by a lofty wall or a spacious edifice.

The benefit of a fine sunshine is as much to be desired for such a garden, as the noxious winds are to be dreaded. A situation to the south is generally the most eligible of any unless your land be extremely light and thin; for it will then be exhausted by too much heat. An opening to the east is likewise more esteemed than one to the west, but a northern aspect is the worst of all, if it be not recompensed by an excellent temperament of soil.”

The Chevalier then discusses what he has experienced.

“What you have observed, Sir, of the situation of a garden in general, may certainly be said of each particular wall. The best espaliers, therefore, are those which are visited by a southern sun; and next to this situation we approve of a wall placed to the east. Be so good as to inform me, Sir, to what trees these exposures are appropriated; I have sometimes seen peaches and pears that have been rather scorched than ripened, in a position to the south.”

The Prior replies:

And from the same book:

A Gardener And His Plants

I am delighted to behold a person employed, amidst the plants of a spacious garden, in reforming, by proper methods, a growth of natural wildings; to see him banish one particular species from his domain, while he affords a favourable reception to another, and naturalises none but useful subjects. He cultivates mutual alliances between his plants, promotes those adoptions that unite divided families, and transfers a dignity to those that were not conspicuous in the community, till then. He refines rusticity into politeness, and fuses a tractable softness into savage dispositions. In a word, our gardener appears to us with the air of legislator, who is sedulous to civilise a barbarous people.

“A southern espalier is reserved for winter Bonchretiens, Muscadine grapes, and all those fruits that are not easily ripened. A wall that fronts the rising sun is more proper for peaches, apricocks, and some species of exquisite and tender pears, whose colour we have an inclination to heighten. A western exposure has likewise its merit, but a northern is the least favourable of all, for the sun, even in the longest days, can only visit that quarter with a few scattered rays divested of their genial warmth.”

The Chevalier has a remedy.

“His Lordship, the Count, gave me an opportunity of observing that he had made every wall in his kitchen-garden accessible to the sun. Instead of causing the four walls directly to front the four quarters of the world, he opposed to those regions the four corners that join the walls. In consequence of which disposition the rising sun warms the two espaliers that unite in the western point; when he gains his noon-day height, he sheds his heat along the two walls that join to the north; and when he sinks to the west, he darts his rays on the walls that point to the east.”

The Prior approves of this and has another good suggestion.

“All the parts of the garden therefore receive his benign impressions, and every wall is covered with a uniform verdure.

As the extraordinary benefit, that results from proper exposures, peculiarly relates to the espaliers, care should be taken to strengthen the reflection of the sun-beams by a very white and smooth parget which exactly closes all the cavities that would otherwise imbibe or deflect the light.” (*To parget*, was to cover or daub a surface with plaster, or to whitewash a surface. It was sometimes used to describe a woman applying heavy make-up! **SRH**)

This has another advantage, as the Chevalier points out.

“The same expedient chases away rats, mice, dormice, and all noxious animals, and compels them to search elsewhere for their prey.”

The conversation then turns to the best woods to use for lattice-work (heart of oak or chestnut) and the finer points of plant cultivation.

Sheila Holroyd



Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

Perhaps I can answer two queries in the January 2006 Newsletter?

Sheila Holroyd asks what is sow-bread? The late Christopher Lloyd in "The Year at Great Dixter" (published 1987), states that his mother called *Cyclamen hederifolium*, known in her day as *C. neopolitanum*, sow bread, to annoy him, this being one of its vernacular names.

John Edmondson is looking for Lea Hall, Cheshire. In Ormerod's "History of Cheshire" (2nd edit. 1882), vol.

3 under WIMBALDSLEY, is a footnote – 'Lea Hall, Wimbaldsley, was for some time an occasional residence of Dr Fothergill: - "In 1766, he began to withdraw from Midsummer to Michaelmas, from the excessive fatigue of his profession, to Lea Hall, near Middlewich in Cheshire, which though he only rented it by the year, he spared no expence to improve. During this recess he took no fees, but attended to prescribe gratis at an inn at Middlewich, once a week. Chalmers, Biog.Dict. XV. 515.'"

"Cheshire Country Houses" by de Figueiredo and Treuherz 1988, states that Lea Hall, Wimbaldsley (its modern spelling), is of the early 18th century, and in a ruinous condition.

**John Davies
Withington**

Designing Arcadia

CGT's January event took place at Manchester Metropolitan University Library and introduced members to treasures of its Special Collections.

Over 160 years, librarians at Manchester's School of Art and Design (now MMU) have built up one of the country's foremost collections of books on the visual arts. For this special CGT evening, about 60 books had been selected for viewing and handling, most from the former Manchester Society of Architects' Library, transferred to the then College of Art and Design in 1967.

What a rich feast for the bibliophile and garden historian!

Here were the original eighteenth century folios of superbly detailed engravings that had been consulted by the Georgian gentry in their quest to recreate the scenes and buildings seen on the Grand Tour or in Claude's paintings - the source and pattern books for 'designing Arcadia': James Gibbs' *Book of Architecture*, 1728; Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus*, 1715; Piranesi's *Vedute di Roma*, 1762; William Kent on Inigo Jones, 1770; William Mason's poem, *English Garden*, 1781; and *The Antiquities of Athens*, measured and delineated by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, 1762.

There were several contemporary guide books for visitors dating from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, (including, for example, Cheshire's Eaton Hall) and many more on the design of villas and gardens. A rare opportunity to handle a facsimile of a Humphry Repton Red Book was provided in the Red Book for Sheringham in Norfolk with its 'lift the flap' before and after improvements.

After our delighted 'hands-on' perusal of these treasures, Christopher Christie, a member of CGT and author of *The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century*, provided the context. Christie's lecture emphasised the huge variety of finely illustrated books available throughout the eighteenth century, and the importance of the library in the English country house. He then led us through 150 years of developments and changes in taste and design, from the formality and grandness of French classicism to Palladianism, the emergence of the 'natural' garden to the Picturesque - a fascinating journey illustrated and witnessed by the books in front of us.

On behalf of all attending, our thanks go to Christopher Christie for a most interesting talk, the MMU Library for opening its doors and CGT for organising the event and starting us off with delicious refreshments. More, please ...next year?

Gaye Smith

The MMU Library's Special Collections are open for private research (Mon-Fri 10-4), appointments by phone 0161 247 6107 or e-mail: lib-special-col@mmu.ac.uk. Website: www.library.mmu.ac.uk/info/specialcol

Exhibitions from the Special Collections are free and open to all; the 2006 programme includes: New acquisitions including those purchased with the aid of MLA/ Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grants and the work of the children's book illustrator, John Lawrence.

A small selection of Architectural and Landscape History source books from the Library of Nigel Temple will feature in Manchester Metropolitan University Library's forthcoming exhibition: "A new chapter: Book Design acquisitions." Sir Kenneth Green Library, All Saints, Manchester, Monday- Friday 10.00 a.m.-4.00 p.m. 25 April-16 September 2006.

‘Parks for People’ by Allan Ruff

Allan Ruff was tempted out of retirement to give a stimulating talk focusing on Philip’s Park, Manchester and the social context and influences on its development.



Philips Park is opposite the City of Manchester Stadium

Allan researched and wrote a biography of the park (published by the University of Manchester, occasional paper 56, 2000). His account provided much food for thought, not least concerning the amount of research still to be undertaken on parks and park keepers, the heritage that is being lost not only on the ground but also in depositories, and how careful understanding of parks and their significance can provide a key to future use and relevance.

The concept of Birkenhead Park, 1843, was to provide a piece of countryside in the town for public recreation but without recreation facilities, the park to be maintained by sheep grazing.

By contrast the Manchester parks competition brief, 1845, stipulated the provision of facilities for public recreation at the outset and ample room for the promenading of large numbers of people.



Joshua Major of Leeds won the competition, went on to lay out Philip’s Park and described his approach to landscape gardening in ‘The Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening’, 1852.

When the park opened in 1846 the Parks Committee

had not anticipated the need to provide for park management! Notices giving details of opening times and cautioning visitors regarding use were hastily posted and the appointment of park keepers followed.

Allan mentioned that the parks were always strapped for cash and so often used cheap materials, and that the taking of hay crops was a source of income in the early days.

Continually developing facilities, the popularity of band concerts and dancing, monkey runs, holidays at home, plant propagation and the involvement of a succession of horticulturalists from the same family are all themes found in Philip’s Park and echoed in parks in other towns and cities.

It is hard now for us to conceive how novel and popular these first public parks were as free and accessible places of recreation.



Many parks were built on poor quality land. Poor drainage remains a problem, here on the football pitch at Philips Park

The introduction of bandstands and dancing increased their popularity, continuing the pattern of the park being the place to be seen, to meet and make a match. Since the Clean Air Act (1956) it is also difficult for us to imagine the problems faced by the park keepers in establishing and maintaining planting. They had to rely on a few hardy species (and even these needed replacing every few years) and bedding, which provided colour and interest and was a means of expression for their horticultural talents.

It will be interesting to witness the next phase in the life of Philip’s Park as part of the regeneration of east Manchester and to see if the needs of the local community influence change.

Barbara Moth

Postscript: ‘The Garden’ (March 06) carried a piece about Shibden Park in Halifax that has received HLF funding for renewal. The proposed work includes the restoration of a garden designed by Joshua Major in 1850 for which Calderdale Borough Council have the plans and have identified the exact location of the beds through geophysical survey.

Being Ruthless with Ruth ... basic pruning with Ruth Brown at Tatton Park.

There are two types of amateur pruner - hackers and tweekers. The first are indiscriminate and often wield power tools, cutting everything back regardless of whether the poor shrub needs it or not. And then there are the tweekers (and I count myself among this group), who spend forever taking an inch off here and an inch off there while making no appreciative impact on the overall appearance of the plant.

An approach somewhere between the two is the ideal and this is what Ruth spent a chilly morning in March teaching a group of CGT members. We started off in the warm as Ruth talked theory about why, when and how to prune. In essence, reasons for pruning are to maintain the health and shape of plants and to maximize flowers or fruit.

She also went through various groups of deciduous and evergreen shrubs and trees, explaining the best time to prune and whether they should be cut back hard or just tidied and trimmed. This gave us all the chance to ask about our own problem plants - "what should I do about my overgrown buddleia/hydrangea/fuschia/cotinus/yew etc?" Ruth patiently and expertly covered all our particular concerns.

The right tool for the right job is paramount and Ruth took us through an impressive array of saws, shears, knives and loppers. She also kindly agreed to sharpen all our secateurs. Mine had the dubious honour of being the bluntest of the bunch!

The beauty of this course was the practical aspect. I've always found those funny outline diagrams of shrubs

with black lines cutting across the branches particularly baffling, so actually watching Ruth tackle a group of large and overgrown viburnums was most informative. Better still, was the opportunity to have a go ourselves.



A cold day, but well worth the effort

We must have acquitted ourselves reasonably well, because Ruth then let us loose in Tatton's Rose Garden, where under her careful direction, we cut away dead and weak branches, removed overcrowded shoots and shortened stems. The finished section, though I say so myself, looked most professional and we all agreed that we would visit in the summer to see how well our section compared to the rest.

An excellent morning - both informative and enjoyable and highly recommended.

Tina Theis

Ian Hamilton Finlay 1925-2006

The Scottish poet, artist and philosopher Ian Hamilton Finlay died on March 27 2006. Finlay designed one of the most creative twentieth century gardens for his home, Little Sparta, at Stonypath in the Scottish borders, South of Edinburgh. Well-remembered for his dispute with Strathclyde Council over the rating of his farmhouse which the authorities deemed should be rated as an art gallery, Finlay was subjected to the seizure of several works of art when he refused to pay. His garden is a remarkable evocation of his art and ideas, steeped in classicism and the English Arcadian tradition; his installations reflect the subjects which fascinated him: nautical, historical, political and classical.

Yet it is an entirely unique twentieth century creation. Installations on a surprisingly small scale harmonize sculptures, stone carvings of concrete poetry, monuments and plaques, with the surrounding plants, water and natural landscape.

An important early concrete poet, Finlay's printed works survive in the publications of his Wild Hawthorn Press, his beautiful poem cards, witty word puns and printed poster series. Many of these can be seen in Manchester Metropolitan University Library's Special Collections – www.library.mmu.ac.uk/info/specialcol.

Gaye Smith

Want to know more? – visit www.ianhamiltonfinlay.com and www.littlesparta.org.

1st Annual General Meeting of the Cheshire Gardens Trust and 2006 Spring Lecture

We had a very good turnout for our first ever AGM. For those who unfortunately could not be with us.....

The Setting

The CGT was very fortunate in being able to hold its first ever AGM at Eaton Park on the 28th March, by kind permission of Their Graces, the Duke and Duchess of Westminster.

Close to 80 people gathered in the delightful surroundings of the Long Room, and were able to appreciate the beautiful paintings, tapestries and furnishings while enjoying sparkling wine, an appetizing buffet and the chance to meet fellow CGT members.

There was also the opportunity to visit the chapel and library and see the remarkable grotto in the entrance hall.

In addition, Eileen Simpson, Eaton's knowledgeable archivist, had put together a fascinating collection of maps, plans and drawings relating to the history of the designed landscape and gardens at Eaton and she was on hand to talk about the archive and answer questions.

The AGM

Ed Bennis, our Chairman, presided over the AGM, welcoming members and guests and dealing efficiently with the with the business part of the meeting. This included the election of the committee. Ed presented Sheila Holroyd, outgoing membership secretary with a bouquet of flowers in thanks for all her hard work.

We were delighted to welcome Val Hepworth, Chairman of the Association of Garden Trusts, to our AGM and was she was keen to say a few words.

She congratulated the CGT on what it has achieved to date and spoke enthusiastically about how we might build on these achievements and further develop links with both the AGT and other Gardens Trusts.

We were similarly pleased that our patron, Viscount Ashbrook, was able to join us for the evening and address the audience.

He complimented the Trust on the wide range of activities embarked upon since our launch nearly two years ago and went on to introduce our guest speaker, David Jacques, a writer and consultant on historic landscapes, parks and gardens.

The Lecture

David spoke about the landscape and gardens at both Eaton and Cholmondleley and explored the case for conservation or change. He used archival material to illustrate his lecture, which tied in nicely with the exhibition of Eaton's Archives already on display.

David was the first Inspector of Historic Parks and Gardens at English Heritage and, as expected, translated his passion for landscape conservation and change into a stimulating, engaging and enjoyable presentation.

A big thank you to all those members and their guests who were able to attend for helping to make this first ever AGM such a successful and enjoyable event.

Tina Theis

It seems that everyone had a great evening. Here are some of the comments we received:

Your 1st AGM was a triumph – well done – and most enjoyable. Thank you to you all for inviting me and allowing me a few minutes of 'air-time' (Ian said that I was rather loud, but I'm not used to microphones!)

We got home about 11.30 pm and felt very elated after such a lovely visit.

I know how much work goes into running a Gardens Trust and you've all done brilliantly.

Hope to be over again. Kindest regards

Val Hepworth YGT & AGT

I share your pleasure at the occasion. Super venue; whoever suggested it, well done!

Please tell David how much I enjoyed his talk. The phrase "gardens give a unique insight into the psyche of the designer", struck me very forcefully.

John Edmondson

Ed,

Just a short note to congratulate you on last night's meeting. It was a great success and so good to think all the hard work has finally come together and CGT is well away. You were a great "chair", very relaxed and at ease, although I'm sure you had a few anxious moments.

Congratulations too to all the team.

Best wishes.

Joan Colclough

I thought it was a wonderful evening last night - superb location, refreshments and organisation. It was a treat simply to drive through the park. Thank you for all the preparation and time that you have put in to to make it such a success.

Barbara Moth

Scheme to widen the M6

In the last edition of the Newsletter we mentioned the proposal to widen the M6. CGT member Geoffrey Sparrow, who is also a member of the Cheshire branch of the CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England), kindly provided more information.

Everyone who has travelled on the M6 knows that it can become very congested. The purpose of the MIDMAN study (West Midlands to North West Conurbations Multi-Modal Study) was 'to develop a strategy and plan for transport between the West Midlands and the North West' (Department for Transport).

Increasing the number of lanes for traffic on the M6 would, in theory, help with traffic flow. Opponents point out that improving the motorway would simply increase the amount of traffic and therefore of CO₂ emissions at a time when the country is supposed to be dedicated to reducing these.

Each proposal for widening the M6 would result in loss of countryside, but to a greater or lesser extent. The CPRE was not in favour of any, but recognised that, if the M6 widening is to go ahead, the one with the least environmental impact is the preferable one.

The most harmful suggestion is an **Expressway**. It would add a new dual two-lane motorway to one side of the M6 – a toll-road similar to the one around Birmingham. This would take up most land (estimate 500 hectares), as it would not only add four new lanes of motorway, but would include toll booth areas, new slip roads and junctions.

Parallel Widening would also take up a fair amount of land (estimate 300 hectares). This proposal would add

a new carriageway on one side of the M6. The existing motorway would be re-organised so that the additional carriageway needed for the other direction would be created out of the existing 'footprint'. Construction for parallel widening would be easier than for symmetrical widening, so there is a danger that the short-term benefits would be the focus rather than the longer-term disbenefits. More land would be needed as bridges and access points would need to be re-built.

The least damaging proposal is **Symmetrical Widening**, which would only take about 150 hectares, provided bridges were not rebuilt. The method would involve adding a new hard shoulder on each side of the motorway, turning the existing hard shoulders into new lanes. If the hard shoulder is suspended under bridges, then these would not need to be re-built, which would reduce the environmental impact.

Look on the Department for Transport website for more information:

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_about/documents/page/dft_about_503875-02.hcsp.

Much of this is indecipherable if you don't know the background. This you can get from

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmtran/38/38ap54.htm>, which is an appendix to Minutes of Evidence to the Select Committee on Transport in 2003.

Heritage Link

Cheshire Gardens Trust is affiliated to the Association of Gardens Trusts (AGT). Through the AGT, we are part of a much wider network of heritage groups.

Heritage Link was set up in 2002. It consists of 82 different organisations each dealing with an aspect of Heritage.

In addition to the AGT, Heritage Link includes other well known bodies such as The National Trust and the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

Reading through their membership list can bring some surprises. Did you know there is a British Institute of Organ Studies? Its aims are much like ours – just replace the words 'gardens and landscape' with 'historic organs and organ music'.

Or have you heard of the Vivat Trust? It's a charity which rescues dilapidated and historic listed buildings. In order to meet the running costs, the restored buildings are let out as holiday homes.

The Heritage Link web-site is business-like rather than exciting (a search function would be useful). The work-plan for the year is well-organised and ambitious.

Last July they set themselves the task of finding out whether the Government's stated objective of making the planning system more accessible and in touch with local communities was working.

The results of their questionnaire were published this month. They found that only 41% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the way they had been consulted.

Every fortnight the Heritage Link Update is sent out by e-mail. It contains a list of web-links to items of interest. If you would like to have the e-mail forwarded on to you, please let me know, and I will add your address to the list. Send your details to JoyUings@aol.com.

Joy Uings

Events Programme May-August 2006

The Events working group has three more delectable visits lined up for us.

On Thursday 15 June we have a visit to the **National Wildflower Centre** which starts with refreshments (good!) followed by a guided tour. Then after a buffet lunch the afternoon will be free to enjoy the facilities. If you have been thinking about having a wildflower meadow (corner) in your garden, why not follow the instructions on <http://www.wildflower.org.uk/howtodoit/wfhowtodoit.html> then come along and buy your seeds!

Wednesday 12 July is the date for the visit to Trentham (see page 5). After morning elevenses (the Events Group really knows what's important) we will be taken around by the Head Gardener. It's mid-week again, but that means it won't be crowded (it's before the school holidays). So we'll have a really wonderful experience. Bring a picnic. (I wonder, can the Events Group guarantee sunshine?)

In August there will be an evening visit to Walkden Gardens in Sale. I discovered this garden a few years' back. I walked round and thought – 'it's like Hidcote'. So I felt very clever when I discovered that this was indeed the intention. Mind you Walkden Gardens is the merest fraction of the size of Hidcote, so come and be amazed at how they have achieved such a result in so small a space. The gardens are still being renovated. For those of you who knew the dovecote that used to stand forlornly at Junction 6 of the M60 – this is its new home!

The *History Matters* – *Pass it On* Campaign

On 2nd July, a big public awareness heritage campaign will be launched: **History Matters – Pass it On**.

Its purposes are to

- Demonstrate widespread popular support and interest in history and heritage
- Increase public engagement with history and heritage
- Create new opportunities for existing audiences and reach new audiences

- Help the heritage sector understand better what it is about history and heritage that people care about and why
- Create a positive media profile and attitude to history and heritage and its role in contributing to our quality of life

If you belong to an organisation which is planning a History Matters event, why not let us know.

If the event is planned to take place after July, we will be happy to publicise it to all our members.

Secret Gardens of West Surrey

In the January newsletter we reported on the venture by Joy Jardine and Jane Fairbank to run garden visits in Surrey. They have now finalised their programme. There will be three tours in 2006. Tour 1 – 30 May to 2 June; tour 2 – 5 to 8 June and tour 3 – 19 to 22 September.

Each tour begins at teatime and ends at lunchtime. Cost is £390 p.p. based on 2 people sharing (single supplement on request).

All tours include Munstead Wood, The Quadrangle,

Munstead Orchard and Millmead.

Other gardens visited will vary from tour to tour, so check before booking.

A deposit of £100 is required to reserve a place (refundable if cancellation is six weeks or more before date of tour).

For more information contact Joy Jardine: 01483 416961 (joy.jardine@britishlibrary.net) or Jane Fairbank: 01483 892242 (fairbank@onetel.com).

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the Newsletter Editor, 26 Sandford Road, Sale, M33 2PS or e-mail JoyUings@aol.com.