

Patron: The Viscount Ashbrook

Newsletter

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- ✘ Wed. 14 December: Christmas Party, Toft Cricket Club, Knutsford
- ✘ Wed. 25 January: Designing Arcadia, Manchester Metropolitan University

Eaton Hall

Every family home evolves over time, the house and garden changing to adapt to new needs and personal preferences. In spite of its size Eaton Hall is a family home, where the son brings his friends to play on the lawn.

This fact was made very clear when members of the Cheshire Gardens Trust were shown round the gardens on August 28th by the head gardener, Les Armstrong.

The Grosvenor family have owned Eaton since the twelfth century, and the estate now consists of eighteenth and nineteenth century landscape park and nineteenth and twentieth century formal gardens.

It was probably Capability Brown who replaced formal landscaping in the eighteenth century with curved drives and lozenge shaped clumps of trees which create uncluttered views of landscape with sweeping lawns.

John Webb, a pupil of William Eames, provided “The Serpentine Lake”, and about 1804 Webb carried out extensive work on the avenues, as well as adding 64 acres of plantations with 130,000 trees.

Other designers such as William Nesfield worked on the gardens over the years.

From 1939 onwards Eaton Hall was occupied by the army and navy, and in 1961-5 not only was Alfred Waterhouse’s grandiose Gothic Revival Victorian house demolished, but concrete runways had to be removed!

The modernist house built in 1963 was replaced by a more traditional house designed by the Percy Thomas Partnership in 1991.

The house was designed to harmonise with the remaining Victorian structures, and Arabella Lennox-Boyd drew up a 15-year plan for the restoration, design and maintenance of the 85-acre gardens. As she said, “The most important challenge was to relate the new Hall ... to its grand surroundings without making the house seem more modest by comparison.”

What the visitor sees today is a combination of professional design and personal preference where there has been a gradual evolution of some areas and the transformation of others.

The present Duchess of Westminster takes a keen interest in the garden, touring it on her motorbike, and her wishes have affected many aspects. For example, she did not wish to see brightly-coloured flowers from her bedroom window in the morning, so the Dragon Garden has silver-leaved plants and purple and blue flowers to provide a more soothing outlook.



The new design is surrounded by 400-year old yew hedges. It was also at the request of the duchess that the beautiful herb garden was created in the 1980s outside the Dutch Tea House.

Statuary and fountains add to the beauty of the gardens. Favourites are probably the Dragon Fountain and its accompanying statues, and the dramatic sculptures in the oval pool of a lioness pursuing a deer. (*see overleaf*)



Although the number of gardeners has been reduced, from forty-nine in the 1930s to a mere ten nowadays, the gardens are functional as well as beautiful, supplying fruit and vegetables throughout the year for the family's three estates.

The pot plants and flowers required for arrangements in the house are also provided by the garden for virtually all the year.

An attractive feature of the fruit garden are the 'step-over' apples which surround the beds, and the orchard

has been replanted with species which have associations with neighbouring areas, such as the Ecclestone Pippin.

It is reassuring to learn that even such magnificent gardens can make mistakes and suffer from the same troubles as the owners of somewhat smaller gardens.

When the wild-flower meadow was originally sown without clearing the ground first, it was soon dominated by a fine crop of thistles. In common with most of us this year, the lack of rainfall has caused problems.

While a heron flew gracefully around, Les Armstrong complained bitterly about the havoc dozens of the birds had caused among the fish. At least most of us only have to endure the depredations of one or two!

Members of the Trust admired the beauty of the gardens while trying not to be too envious, and appreciated the peace and tranquillity. It was a privilege to be shown round at a time when no other members of the public were admitted.

Gaye Smith & Sheila Holroyd

Visit To Grappenhall Heys – 25th September 2005

When I saw Grappenhall Heys on the list of future events for CGT I immediately signed up.

This, I thought, will be a trip down memory lane.

Well, it was and it wasn't !

As a girl between the ages of about 12 and 16 I was a regular visitor to the Grappenhall Heys estate.

My schoolfriend's father farmed at Witherwin Farm on the edge of the estate and we had permission to ride over the land. So, many a weekend and summer evening saw us hacking out over the estate on our ponies.

It was lovely - no traffic, perfectly safe and unspoilt. We could ride and chat to our heart's content almost as far as our young eyes could see.

In those days the house, built around 1830 by Thomas Parr of Parr's Bank in Warrington (later absorbed into Martins Bank and ultimately becoming Barclays Bank), still stood, albeit somewhat sadly as it was by then a furniture depository for Pickfords.

Our schoolgirl minds dreamed up all sorts of tales for the house, trying to picture the people who had once lived there, and imagining ghosts. Often we dismounted and explored the exterior of the house and outbuildings.

I looked forward to recapturing these early memories.

I was in for a shock!

First of all there was finding it - not an easy task as even the roads had changed.

Witherwin Farm, once so well known to me, now stands in the midst of a network of new roads and without the map sent out by the CGT I would never have found the entrance to Grappenhall Heys at all. All the landmarks previously known to me had either disappeared or seemed, because of the change of road layout, to be in a different place.

Nevertheless the small group of CGT members all made it to the assigned meeting place to be met by Barbara Moth of the CGT, Cliff Taylor from Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council and Maria, consultant landscape manager who conducted the tour. The house which once so proudly stood looking over its ha-ha and park towards the small town of Warrington is no longer, only the footprint remains. And the grand terraces laid out in front of the house are now woodland. We constantly had to use our imaginations. Even I, who once knew it so well, struggled to imagine it as it once had been.

Areas of new housing sit in groups around what was the parkland, interspersed with features surviving from the estate such as ponds and stands and belts of trees. The garden paths and walks close to the site of the house, through what would once have been rock and dell gardens, still remain.

Although now, instead of rich and colourful planting and fernerys, the thugs have taken over and *Rhododendron ponticum* proliferates with giant Oak and Beech.

The ha-ha, almost lost in undergrowth, gazes now not over parkland but over new road networks and Fiddler's Ferry power station in the distance.

But then, in the midst of this mixture of the old and new, comes the hidden jewel, the walled garden. Now almost completely restored, it appears more or less as the Parr family would have known it.

The Walled Garden is unusual if not unique in that it combines two functions within its single walled area. It is both kitchen garden and pleasure garden.

The kitchen garden is laid out to the production of vegetables and fruit. Fruit trees are both free standing and espaliered on the walls.

The central area is a small Box garden planted with herbs. The perimeter beds are planted with flowering plants; from old photographs these would appear to have originally been bedding plants, now they are herbaceous perennials.



Along the wall orientated to the south-west the framework remains of the original greenhouses complete with the chimneys from the flues in the wall to supply heating for the produce within. These greenhouses are backed by a range of outbuildings which would have been used by the gardeners. The garden is today owned and managed (using contractors) by the parish council with the Warrington Organic Gardeners cultivating the kitchen garden: they have been gardening on this forgotten site for at least the last twenty years and the whole site is bursting with produce. There is now a general air of a new beginning as the garden awakes to its new more public life as from a long sleep.

In contrast to the formality of the Kitchen Garden, the Pleasure Gardens, also within the walls, are laid out informally with winding paths surrounding three large and deep ornamental ponds.

These ponds appear to have been purpose built and have neat stone built sides. They have been cleared of the years of accumulated silt and debris and now retain their former glory. All except one of the original pathways which circumnavigated the pleasure area have been replaced by a new path going straight through the garden from one area of housing to another. Planting comprises of some existing trees and shrubs but much new planting is planned and some is already in place, notably a new Holly walk.

This walled garden, restored over a period of 10 years by the Commission for New Towns, now English Partnerships, was in April 2005 handed over to Grappenhall & Thelwall Parish Council with an endowment to cover the costs of future management and opening to the public. It will form an integral part of the community of new houses which surround it and it is important that it be used properly and to its and the community's best advantage. Most fortunately the funding already in place will provide for a permanent steward to look after the gardens. Different ideas for its role in the community - one possibility is for it to be used as a teaching garden - are currently under discussion.

Almost no records or photographs have been found so far: the Parr family moved away to southern Ireland, but from historical map data the period 1875 to 1899 appears to have been the zenith for the estate. This is therefore considered the most significant period for the design of the garden, and the one which has informed the refurbishment work.

I wonder what Thomas Parr would think if he returned? Even in my lifetime it has all, with the exception of the kitchen garden, changed out of all recognition. It is a salutary lesson in the transience of man's time and effect on the landscape.

For me, it was as I had hoped a trip down memory lane, but also a most interesting whole new experience!

Gilly Brown



Exploring the past

In the last two editions, I have written about Edward Leeds. How did I learn about him?

Curiosity was the start. I was reading a book by Mea Allen and the words jumped out at me:

'What was the biggest surprise was meeting 'a gentleman named Leeds' who kept a little botanic garden of his own at Longford Bridge, Stretford, near the River Mersey.

That was on my daily route to work!

'William [Robinson] found it well worth visiting, for it was full of rarities. Edward Leeds, a stockbroker, spent all his leisure time growing old florists' flowers such as auriculas, carnations, pinks and tulips and raising daffodils, concentrating on improving the white and pale-coloured varieties. One day his collection was to become famous as the Leedsii Division of Narcissus.'(1)

Who was this man? Why had I never heard of him? I needed a topic for a research project and now I had found one.

My tutor was sceptical. How would I find enough information to write 10,000 words? That just made me more determined.

But where to begin? There is a book, known as '*Desmonds*' after the editor, but officially called the '*Dictionary of British and Irish Botanists and Horticulturists*'. It provided the following information:

Edward Leeds, 1802-1877
b. Pendleton, Lancs, 9 Sept 1802. d. Bowdon, Cheshire, 1877.
Nurseryman, Manchester. Hybridised narcissi. Joined his son's stockbroker's business.
Bot. Mag. 1834 t. 3295. R Sweet. Br. Flower Garden v.4 1838, t. 65. Gardeners Magazine. Bot. V.3, 1851, 169. Gardeners Chronicle, 1894 iii 561-562, 625-626; 1931 i. 169. Trans. Liverpool Bot. Soc. 1909, 80. Daffodil Yb. 1933, 23-24.
Letters and plants at Kew

Now I was cooking with gas! Look at all those references! And letters!

I booked a visit to London. There was a lovely lady at the Lindley Library. Sally Kington was the International Daffodil Registrar and provided all sorts of books and articles. Kew was great too. They have a wonderful archive full of obscure information. It includes letters from and about Edward Leeds. It introduced me to Leeds' friend, Thomas Glover – a much more interesting correspondent than Leeds. It was Glover who introduced Leeds to William Hooker. Over the following months I found out more and more. And the more I found out, the more I realised that the information in *Desmonds* is **wrong**.

First of all – that 'died in Bowdon'. I was in attendance at a stall at the Tatton Flower Show and fell into conversation with a woman who told me that Leeds was probably buried at St Mary's – she told me to contact Derrick Murdie. Derrick was brilliant. I told him of my quest. He checked the records and led me directly to a patch of grass. 'It will be here' he said and stuck his spade into the turf. Minutes later he had uncovered two graves - one of Edward, his wife and baby son, the other of Edward's parents and unmarried brother and sister.



I learned that people used to choose to be buried at St Mary's because it is on a hill. Low lying areas in Manchester were subject to flooding – the cemetery alongside Philips Park in Manchester flooded and dead bodies floated around! The Bowdon burial records show that Leeds died where he had lived – in Stretford. There is something very satisfying about proving received knowledge to be wrong. The second thing was that bit about joining '*his son's stockbroker's business*'. Trafford and Manchester Central Libraries have plenty of local directories. These provided valuable information about Edward and his family – what business they were in, where they lived. Eventually, with the help of a local historian, Alan Morrison who had directories that not even the libraries have, I was able to piece together Leeds' business life – at least from 1836 onwards. That year he is clearly shown as a Sharebroker (living in Hulme – his father, also a sharebroker, lived at Longford Bridge). Now, census details show that Edward's eldest son was 14 in 1851. That means in 1836 he was – well, not yet born. Joined his son's stockbroking business? I don't think so.

What about his being a nurseryman? Well, all I can say is 'not proven'. The lack of directory information prior to 1836 is a hindrance. Glover's letter to William Hooker dated October 15 1833 refers to Leeds as

having ‘*lately commenced business as a florist, etc*’ and when this appeared in Curtis’ Botanical Magazine the following year, it had been changed to ‘*commenced business as a Nurseryman and Florist*’. When an article about Leeds appeared in the *Gardener’s Chronicle* in 1894, there was an assertion that Leeds had applied for the job of curator at the Manchester Botanic Gardens, but one of our members – Ann Brooks – has been researching the history of the Gardens. She has not found any evidence that Leeds did so.

It was not only *Desmonds* that was wrong. Mea Allen’s statement was wrong too. She said that he lived near the River Mersey. That came from the 1894 article, but was also wrong. It was the Bridgewater Canal that ran near the garden. And to say that Leeds’ collection became ‘*famous as the Leedsii Division of Narcissus*’ was wrong too. It was Leeds’ name that was commemorated – his daffodils were placed in many different divisions.

It was an exciting few months, the time I did the research on Edward Leeds. Along the way I met or corresponded with many people I would not otherwise have come across. The most exciting came about because I was trying to track down Edward Leeds’ *Crocus vernus var. Leedsii* (lost to cultivation, I’m afraid). I wrote to Brian Mathew, author of the book ‘*The Genus Crocus*’. He knew Everett Leeds – whose own specialism is *Clematis* – who is interested in the history of the Leeds family. He put me in touch with Geoffrey Leeds – Edward Leeds’ great-grandson. Geoffrey was able to send me a copy of a photo of Edward Leeds. At last I could put a face to the name.

I finished my project – it ran to more than 12,000 words – but I know there is more to uncover. Maybe, one day, I’ll begin the search again.

(1) Allen, Mea. (1982) *William Robinson, 1838-1935*. London, Faber and Faber Limited

Joy Uings

Progress Of An Ignorant Gardener

I have a confession to make. I know very little about gardening. I keep firmly to narrow beds round square lawns, and most of our plants were already there when we moved in or have invaded us from our neighbours. When I go to a garden centre I usually buy one specimen of an attractive flower and plant it wherever there happens to be a space. Sometimes I get a shock, like the time I bought a three-inch high seedling of a tibouchina because I felt sorry for it (and it had been reduced to fifty pence) and it promptly grew twelve feet tall.

My husband did manage to grow four Indian bean trees from seed, and we were so amazed at this that we couldn’t bear to throw any of them away. As a result, they now dominate much of our garden and I am still wondering how we can grow bean trees while our runner beans are a dismal failure.

I joined the Cheshire Gardens Trust when it was first set up because a friend of mine who had studied horticulture was going to join, and I thought I might learn something useful.

Was it worthwhile?

Well, I have thoroughly enjoyed visiting beautiful gardens which have ranged from the splendours of Eaton Hall and Tatton Park to the lovingly-cultivated ‘garden rooms’ of a suburban semi-detached, though as I shivered in a bitter wind I was not surprised to learn that Cadbury’s had set up their factory on the Wirral because it always enjoyed a cooling breeze.

I was pleased to discover that the events added to my

knowledge of local and social history, and lectures on Japanese gardens have taught me a little about design. I like listening to experts who care deeply about their specialist subjects. My knowledge of horticulture has improved slightly, and though I am still shaky on technical terms and Latin names I am bluffing better.

So, I am now a committed member of the Cheshire Gardens Trust. If you look for me on visits, I will be the one listening hard and saying little, and at the end I will usually be carrying home one of the plants on offer – so long as it isn’t an Indian bean tree.

Sheila Holroyd



If you’d like to know more about the Indian Bean Tree – or *Catalpa bignonioides* to give it its posh name - visit www.ibiblio.org/pfaf/cgi-bin. Sheila could add her own story to those of others who have also grown the tree. As it can reach 15-20 metres high and the same wide, I hope Sheila’s garden is a big one. Incidentally, the tree does not come from India; the reference is to the North American indigenous peoples. The tree was introduced to this country as early as 1726.

Editor

A Growing Concern: William Roscoe and Liverpool's first Botanical Garden

The University of Liverpool Art Gallery is presenting an exhibition marking the bicentenary of Liverpool's first botanical garden, which was founded by William Roscoe and opened in 1803.

It includes a wide selection of botanical art, contemporary documents and publications, including the City Library's original watercolour drawings for Roscoe's great monograph of the ginger family, *Monandrian Plants of the order Scitamineae*.

Material has been drawn from the collections of National Museums Liverpool, the University Art Collections and the University Library's special collections, including Roscoe's copy of William Roxburgh's *Plants of the Coast of Coromandel*. Other lenders include the (Liverpool) Athenaeum, the Linnean Society of London and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

The exhibition opens on 16 September 2005 and runs until 16 December. The gallery is open Mondays to Fridays 12 noon to 4.00PM, admission free. For further details ring 0151 794 2348 or visit <http://www.liv.ac.uk/artgall/gallery/index.htm>

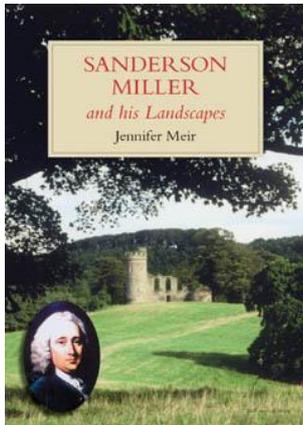


Above, William Roscoe. Below, *Alpina magnifica* Roscoe



John Edmondson

Sanderson Miller and his landscapes



I guess everyone has heard of Capability Brown, but I have to admit that the name Sanderson Miller was not one that I recognised. So I was intrigued by a flyer that was sent to me recently.

Jennifer Meir was instrumental in setting up the Warwickshire Gardens Trust. In 2004 she gained her PhD, having researched Sanderson Miller, who had lived not far from her own home. She has now written a book – due to be published next Spring.

Sanderson Miller lived from 1717 to 1780, so was an exact contemporary of Brown (1715-1783). He was a pioneer of Gothic revival architecture and designed gardens and garden buildings. Some of his work survives at places like Wroxton Abbey and Hagley Hall – the castle ruin at Hagley Hall is pictured on the book's cover.

Capability Brown had 'the highest opinion of' Miller's skill. Indeed, it appears that Miller not only influenced Brown, but helped him gain his early commissions. Jennifer Meir's book is based on research at 35 sites, Miller's correspondence and two surviving diaries.

Although the book will not be published until next Spring, orders placed by 31 October will be at a special price of £24 plus £3.50 p&p. The recommended retail price will be not less than £30. If this is a bit steep for your pocket, why not take the details to your local library and see if they will get a copy.

Orders should be placed with Phillimore & Co Ltd. Shopwyke Manor Barn, Chichester, West Sussex, England, PO20 2BG. e-mail: bookshop@phillimore.co.uk. Or order on-line at www.phillimore.co.uk. **Editor**

Cheshire Gardens Trust events

Tuesday 22 November. The History of the Walled Kitchen Garden – a lecture by Susan Campbell at Bishop Lloyd's Palace, Chester.

Cost: members £6; non-members £8.

Event organiser: Barbara Moth. Tel: 01606 46228

Wednesday 14 December. Christmas Party at Toft Cricket Club, Knutsford. 7.30 for 8 p.m.

Sam Youd, Head of Gardens at Tatton Park, will be chairing a special Gardeners' Question Time, so come armed with all those tricky horticultural problems...

Cost; members £15; non-members £18

Event organiser: Tina Theis. Tel: 0161 442 0657