



Staffordshire Centre

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NEWSLETTER **November 2023**



Celebration
August 24th

(See page 15 for details)

Our website: ntstafford.org.uk

£1.50

What we do

Walks



Talks



Holidays



Visits



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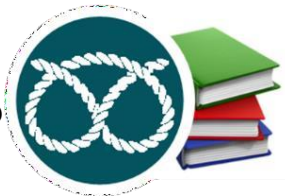


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Joan Jobling

Talks Coordinator

Margaret Winfield

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Nicola Woodhouse

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Member

Ruth Williams

Member

Pam Page

Publicity & Newsletter Editor Philip Grainger

Hon. President: Haydn Poulson

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New Members

We welcome the following new members:

Patricia & Keith Alldritt

Mary Booth

Keith Bowes & Sandra Clarke

Barbara & Graham Bowman

Sally Cave

Diane Cropper

Sandy & Chris Cooke

Amanda Fellows

Jean & Michael Firman

Cathy Griffin

Noreen Hillman

Janet & David Horsnall

Jennifer & Don Mason

Catherine Newton

Linda & Michael Powell

Ruth Roberts

Judith Shaw

Betty Stainsby

Brian Turvey

Joan Jobling

Membership Secretary

Notes from the Chair

Dear Friends

I can't believe that we have reached November already! We have had a busy few months since the last Newsletter in May. Events particularly worth mentioning are our holiday in Ilminster, which was a great success and our 50th Year Celebration at Shugborough in July, which so many of you were able to attend. As you will know, our Centre holiday for 2024 is to Kendal, and is already sold out!

One of the problems we are experiencing together with many other organisations is the cost of hiring coaches, and therefore this spring/summer we have had only two coach visits, the other visits being by car. Talks continue to be well attended and this year, we booked talks throughout the year instead of having a break from May to September. A very useful afternoon was arranged in August for members to get together and discuss the way forward for our Centre.

I note that in the Chair's report at the Annual General Meeting in April David reported a downturn in membership. I am delighted to say that we now have a goodly number of new members and I would particularly like to thank all of you who turned out to help man our stand in the Midden Yard to help us achieve this. Our Centre is now getting even more publicity through the team at Shugborough, which we hope will encourage others to join us.

I hope you have enjoyed the walks, talks and visits provided during the year and will continue to support our future activities.

With best wishes

Margaret Winfield

Notice

Patrick Plant



As most readers will know I like to complete the newsletter with the ‘..and Finally’ section where we tell you about one of our members who have contributed greatly to the Staffordshire Centre. For this edition, I decided to do a piece on Patrick Plant. However, I now find myself writing a different story as Patrick passed away on July 1st 2023 after a very short illness, shocking all of his friends and family. Patrick had only joined the Centre a short time before we could tap into his skills and willingness to help.

As marketing manager for Armitage Shanks, he was responsible for changing the Armitage Shanks logo to the one you see on wash basins now! He later went to work in

Coventry, at a company that dealt with all of Jaguar car's publicity on TV, where Patrick was responsible for all the brochures in every language in the world.

I think we knew we had someone who could change our marketing at the Centre!

He designed the logo we use now, the topic logos you see on the inside page of this document, and the new leaflets and bookmarks we distribute through libraries to complete the set, the boards we use to display at events along with the board in the bookshop. In addition, he created the coasters we presented as prizes on the Ilminster holiday, this year.

All this he did voluntarily, in fact, he suggested doing it.

He was always ready to help, his normal response when meeting me was ‘What do you need me to do, buddy?’

He also helped me directly when I took over the editing of the newsletter. If I wasn't sure about the bits I would have to write myself – his response was simple - ‘if you don't mean it, don't write it!’.

All I can add is that I've tried to keep to that rule.

Thank you, Patrick, I'll miss you, buddy.

Upcoming Events

Talks

All talks are held at Walton Village Hall and start at 2.30 pm

Gadgets & Gizmos - 14th November

A Talk by Kath Reynolds



This is a new offering from the always entertaining Kath Reynolds which has only been available since May this year. The talks Kath presents are a reflection of her interest in people and in social history within living memory. She is a collector and sharer of stories. Like most of her talks, this one is

interactive, she adds a personal touch to each one from the stories I collect along the way. Gadgets and Gizmos – all those fantastic, must-have products, tantalisingly advertised on TV, that we convinced ourselves we couldn't live without – but in fact – became redundant often after the first use!

A History of Jabez Cliff - 12th December

A Talk by Cliff Kirby-Tibbets



The Cliff Family can trace their association with the leather industry back to George Cliff, a bootmaker who left Stafford in 1750 to seek his fortune in Walsall. His son, George Cliff, became an apprentice bridle maker in October 1793. The family business he created was so successful that larger premises were required and the expanding company acquired one of Walsall's major saddlery firms. In the following years, they supplied the MOD with equipment – specialised items for war

and ceremonial items, including the funeral of Princess Diana and, in 2011, the wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton. The company diversified into footballs, luggage, leather goods and golf bags, all carrying the Cliff name, supplying footballs for The World Cup, the Olympic Games and the FA Cup Final.

Diary Dates:

9th January 2024 – Cooks' Tours – Danny Wells

13th February 2024 – Films from Stafford Archives -Ray Johnson

12th March 2024 - History of the Gatehouse Theatre - Keith Harrison

9th April - AGM

Walks

Diary Dates:

6th December – Christmas at The Rag, Rawnsley plus lunch

March 2024 – Cannock Chase – Bob Whitehouse

Reflections

Iminster, Somerset Holiday – May 2023

As with the write-up of last year's holiday the paragraphs below are a summary of the diary we produced for the holiday. You can view all of the diary by going to the website and looking under events.

Friday – the holiday begins: -

36 members boarded Leon's coach before we set off South.

The first stop was **Tyntesfield**



Perfect timing and perfect weather meant that we had a leisurely 3½ hours to explore this fascinating NT property and estate for our “stop on the way” to Iminster.

Tyntesfield made national news in 2002 when the house, with a kitchen garden and park was sold to the highest bidder – the National Trust. Very unusually the Trust wanted to make a bid and raised

£18.2m in 100 days, with promises of further monies from National Heritage/Lottery. An enormous sum secured all the treasures, artefacts, paintings and specially commissioned articles that the resident family had collected over four generations. The only article that the Trust had to bring into the house was the extensive dining table – amongst the 74,000 items catalogued to date.

Girouard, who wrote the book “*The Victorian Country House*”, said of the property, “There is no Victorian country house which so richly represents its age as Tyntesfield”.

I think that my fellow travellers would doubtless agree.

Judy Brass

Saturday 27th May

The Minster Church of St. Mary the Virgin – Ilminster

Walking from the hotel “The Shrubbery”, the top of the Central Tower of the Minster does not become visible until one is quite close.



The tower rises to a height of 90’ and is best seen from Silver St, lower down in the town. Of earlier churches there is no trace; the present one was built in 15c. with numerous alterations and additions made throughout the centuries.

Considering the size of Ilminster, its Minster is certainly very impressive and is rated among Somerset’s finest.

Frances Paget

Barrington Court

After the visit to the town, we set off for Barrington Court. This was to be a garden-only visit, owing to the need to repair the house roof.

On the plus side, this meant more time in the fresh air on a lovely sunny day, in the garden's outdoor "rooms", the detailing of which was influenced by the Arts & Crafts Movement



Reflecting on Barrington Court Garden, an entry in a Restoration Diary is easily understood. The diary was kept from 1921-1925 by Susan Forbes, the sister-in-law of the architect who helped in modernising the house.

Paraphrasing she wrote, "Ronnie" is already saying that she cannot leave home at crocus, daffodil, tulip, lilac and rose times. They leave such narrow intervals; maybe a week or two in August, which brings her very close to beagling time.

Indeed, at the end of any holiday away, thoughts turn to the state of the garden at home!

Frances Paget

Montacute House

After Barrington Court with its beautiful gardens, we travelled a short distance to Montacute House with a promise of more great beauty in the middle of the picturesque village sharing the same name.

It was built by Edward Phelps, a wealthy, ambitious lawyer who was also a member of Elizabeth 1's parliament. His aim was to advertise his lofty position and success – as you do!!

It was a hot afternoon and the inside of the house was pleasantly cool.



The Long Gallery offered a 360° view of the splendid garden and surrounds.

The sunshine called, so it was time to see the Wibbly Wobbly hedge and twisted sweet chestnut trees.

The long drive is absolutely beautiful and we finished by relaxing with drinks and ice-creams in the pleasant café courtyard café.

A lovely day.

Anne Glover

Sunday 28th May

Lyme Regis

The 'Pearl of Dorset' where Mary Anning was born in 1799; the Lyme Regis Museum tells her story and has an excellent display of fossils and also details the history of the town.



Next to the beach, a level promenade is lined with colourful beach huts which lead to the harbour. The historic sea wall, known as 'The Cobb' is an excellent place to walk.

Returning via Langmuir Gardens which is a wonderful place to soak up the sunshine and its elevated position affords far-reaching views over Lyme Bay.

Pam Page

John Makepeace

The second of two non-NT visits on this holiday

After a sunny morning spent in Lyme, we boarded the coach to take us to Beaminster and the home of John Makepeace and his wife Jennie. John split us into two groups so while one group drank tea, ate cake and toured the gardens with Jennie, he introduced examples of his work inside the house.

Inside the house, the hall, lounge and dining room are set out to display not only John's work but also his and Jennie's collection of works of art, each with a story attached.

Around a huge dining table, made from a single sycamore tree, John explained that he sourced the tree from Stafford, from Henry Venable's timber yard. At least one of the group had worked in this yard famous for supplying wood to York Minister, Windsor Castle and the Globe and Swan theatres.



John's designs may not be to everyone's taste, but each piece is remarkable for comfort, practicality and finish I for one would have happily taken the three-legged chair, designed for the chancellor of Plymouth University, home to enjoy and admire but I doubt I could have met the price. An enjoyable afternoon aided by tea and great cakes.

John Hibbs

Monday 29th May
Lytes Cary Manor

We arrived at this delightful old manor house in glorious sunshine. The name comes from one of the families who lived here - Lyte and the name of the river which runs through the estate - the river Cary. The other main family here was the Jenner family.



Sir Walter Jenner bought the manor in 1907 and began to rescue it from decay. We saw the manor collection as it was when this family lived here. Sir Walter and Lady Flora created a new Arts and Crafts garden containing a collection of topiary and herbaceous borders.

You can see a memorial plaque to Sir Walter Jenner in the 14C family chapel.

As there were no other family members to inherit the house and estate, their only daughter Esme having died of pneumonia aged 37, Sir Walter gifted the house in 1948 to the National Trust.

Janet Leek

Tintinhull Garden

Only 11 minutes from our previous visit to Lytes Carey, we arrived at the attractive village of Tintinhull. Steve let us off the coach right by a functioning red phone box - one of few around these days, where we collected for the required group photo.

The Grade 1 Listed 17th-century manor house of local yellow Ham stone is not open to visitors, but part is a NT holiday let.

Phyllis Reiss first developed the strong garden design in the 1930s influenced by travels in Europe and by Vita Sackville West. NT acquired it in 1954, then Penelope Hobhouse next tenant from 1980 influenced the current planting and wrote her well-known garden reference books here.

The sights and sounds of the water features (not isolated by any railings) particularly appealed to me, with water lilies in flower on the Memorial Pool. Warm stone walls encouraged growth especially the wisteria in the courtyard. The kitchen garden has original lanterns and terracotta cloches. We could see through to the goats in the orchard.



Our visit was on such a lovely sunny day, with a light breeze to appreciate the perfumes, especially of the hanging geraniums in the stumpery, where ice creams were enjoyed before walking (or a lift) back down to our coach.

Nicola Woodhouse

Tuesday 30th May

Painswick Rococo Garden, near Stroud

The last visit of our holiday was to Painswick, a garden made in the 1740s by Benjamin Hyett, a landed gentleman who also owned other properties nearby. A decorated plan of 1748 by Thomas Robins of Bath was discovered by the present owner of Painswick House in 1984 and despite the garden having been overgrown by trees and lost for many years, it was decided to recreate it.

Passing through the entrance, the valley garden appears below and the visitor sees it against a large version of Robins' picture so that entering the garden feels like walking into a painting. It is a good recreation and the helpful plan enabled us to discover the paths, follies and flower beds but I did wonder whether the rectangular central feature which has been interpreted as an open kitchen garden would have been located in the



bottom of the valley as at that time gardeners used vast quantities of manure. It surely would have spoiled the effect which the marketing leaflet claims for the garden as having been 'ripe for riotous pleasure and romance'.

Sue Gregory

Return Home

As with every other instance the group was ready, on time, for boarding the coach for our return journey to Stafford.

Having had 5 days of continuous sunshine, which, on looking back from late August, was more than a lucky break but probably the only summer we may get this year. (OK, there were a few days in September, too)

Celebration Party – Shugborough July

More than 50 members joined our celebration at Shugborough in July.

There was a late change of venue as the weather forecast suggested sitting in the walled garden could prove both cold and damp (it was wrong), but sitting together in the Mansion Café proved to be a success as we could all sit together to chat and be entertained. The music was provided by our own DJ, Nigel Holmes (many thanks, Nigel) and there was also an unannounced magician, Lucky Lee, who bamboozled us all with his close-up magic. Many thanks go to **Jen Holsey** and her team for organizing the venue, the excellent food and the support staff who all made this a most enjoyable event to mark our 50th anniversary.



Phil Grainger

Celebration Cruise - August

On a lovely sunny day, 27 Centre members boarded the Georgie Kate Canal Boat at Teddesley, just outside Penkridge, for a 2-hour cruise down the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, with a fish and chip lunch. This visit was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Centre.



The boat was beautifully decorated and tables were laid with pretty cloths and china. We set off promptly at noon. Tea and coffee were served by the very friendly and helpful staff and the fish and chips followed. We were then offered a selection of sweets and drinks.

On our trip, we passed by open countryside and then the gardens of houses and mobile homes which backed onto the canal. There were lots of ducks! We passed through a lock – quite an experience for those who had not been on a canal trip before - and stopped at the Bridge Inn



in Penkridge to turn around for the return journey. Right at 2 p.m. we returned to the boatyard.

A very pleasant two hours with good company.

Margaret Winfield

Talks

Technology through Time – May

Nigel Holmes



Nigel began his talk by explaining that the technology boom has been around since the year 2000.

Today, we don't tend to talk about it as it has become part of our lives.

He then started at the beginning with Neanderthal Man – the start of civilisation as we know it, around 4,000 years ago, when simple flint tools were used.

Modern technology began in the 18th century. Specifically, at Cromford Mill, Nottingham. the world's first successful water-powered cotton spinning mill was built in 1771 by Sir Richard Arkwright.

Nigel then listed notable inventions from the 19th and 20th centuries Hatton Pumping Station and Mill Reece Pumping Station were commissioned to satisfy the increased demand for water in the area.

In computing terms, the Bombe, now in the National Computing Centre at Bletchley was built to decrypt the Enigma code and in 1943 'Colossus' was created, considered to be the first programmable digital computer in the world, it was used to decipher coded messages between Hitler and his senior staff.

In the 1930s electricity was installed in the home, principally to replace gas lighting. Then in 1947 3 pin sockets were devised for safety.

Moving on in the decades Nigel explained the inventions that affected us more directly, such as the battery-driven Bush portable radio and in 1965 colour television.

The list seems endless but when put chronologically, it feels like incremental change means we get used to one thing and then it is either updated or replaced with something better.

Looking to the future we can expect autonomous vehicles to



become commonplace- as electric vehicles are already becoming the standard.

We will be able to list these items on our folding phones and look to the future of more and more technology.

Thanks, Nigel, it shows we have to be told what wasn't there before to understand what's coming soon.

Phil Grainger

The Art of Origami – June

Edward Holmes

As a group we have never offered this type of meeting at Walton Village Hall and, to be frank, we weren't sure of the number of brave souls who would turn up to take on this challenging task!

No need to worry! 24 members sat at tables ready for the action.



Our speaker/teacher was Edward Holmes a member of the British Origami Society (and several other Origami Societies).

Before starting the lesson Edward explained the origins of the art in the UK and the name.

Origami is derived from two Japanese words...

- Ori 折り, meaning 'to fold' And kami 紙, meaning 'paper'

- Thus, Origami translates to 'folding paper' or paper folding.

Many people think that origami originated in Japan, and indeed many earlier origami books will state this. However, it originated in China, where 'modern' paper was first created, as early as the 1st or 2nd century.

- It took until the 6th century before it reached Japan and didn't become popular in the Western world until the 20th century.

- In 1964, Iris Walker, and a small group of people interested in paper folding, came together to share origami ideas and models, and formed the 'Portfolio Society', a forerunner to the 'British Origami Society'.

- Rupert Bear was a cartoon strip, published in the Daily Express and is still a popular children's annual. Alfred Bestall introduced origami to the annuals when he took over as the illustrator in the 1930s, so this is where many children will have first been introduced to paper folding. Although, origami almost certainly become more widely known, via Robert Harbin the well-

known magician.

- In 1968, Yorkshire Television commissioned 32, fifteen-minute episodes called 'Origami', where Robert Harbin demonstrated the folding of various, simple origami models, with accompanying books, 'Teach Yourself Origami' and also in 'Look-In', an ITV children's magazine. The book was later republished as 'Origami 1'

There are no 'real' rules in origami, but purists may argue the following:

- Models must be made from one sheet of paper so that rules out using different materials and modular origami straight away!

- The paper should be square

- No cuts. Shaping should be achieved by folding alone.

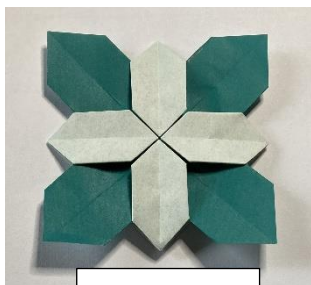
- No glue.

So, sticking by the rules the audience was invited to follow Edward's demonstration and create.

In this session, we were allowed to fold an attractive model, designed by the late, great, Shuzo Fujimoto – a Japanese origami creator whose main focus was geometric origami – from a single square of origami paper, and afterwards view examples of various geometric, modular, origami models.

A great challenge and most enjoyable afternoon, thanks, Edward.

Some examples of the results are shown here.



Edward's



Mine

Phil Grainger

Your Centre Needs You – August

Yet another first for the Centre. This time we gathered at the Hall to discuss ideas for future events and direction for the Centre. The audience was split into small groups of 4 with a committee member assigned to each group to identify the most discussed issues raised.

Having been given a strict 10 minutes on each of the three headings the papers were collected and tea and scones, (thanks to Ruth and Margaret), were served whilst John collated the results.

After the break, John highlighted some of the issues and the committee promised to send out a document with the completed findings, at a future date.

Having completed the tasks requested the audience then took part in what the writer can only describe as a frenetic beetle drive, hosted by Peter. I have never seen a dice fly around so quickly.

No prizes but everyone seemed to enjoy the chaos of moving forwards or backwards across tables depending on whether they had the highest or lowest number of 'bits' when someone



called a complete drawing.

Thanks for your input, John has sent out a summary and we will distribute a more detailed report later in the year.

Phil Grainger

Life with Vintage Fashion – September

Joanne Massey

On a very wet Tuesday afternoon we were transported back to the 1940's and 1950's through the delightful presentation by Joanne Massey demonstrating her wonderful collection of vintage fashion.

35 years ago, the then teenage Joanne fell for 1950s pretty cotton dresses, and has worn these styles ever since.

How has she managed this? She has - and retains the perfect period figure, while the garments she collects were so well made originally that they last for ever, particularly those from USA where wartime rationing was avoided.

In 1950's girls wore versions of their mother's clothes as I did, for 'teenage fashion' only came in with Rock & Roll. But I do remember adding sugar to petticoats to get the full circle skirt look. We enjoyed seeing the many outfits paraded past us by Joanne.

Suits were more substantial than now, properly tailored and lined, so retaining shape and style for long years. Yet soft fabrics added flow and movement to style and appearance. Joanne favours as many bright, sunny



colours as possible, even for her housework clothing, and can certainly carry this off. She is very ably assisted by her husband Kevin who so smoothly located, then packed away each garment in exactly the correct place and time. Joanne has many interesting strings to her bow, she does talks on these roles: she has been maid for Patrick Lichfield at Shugborough, is also singer Lola Lamour. Her neighbour the late Lady Nancy Bagot gave Joanne some interesting clothes and the Harrods handbag which Lady Bagot used when H M The Queen visited to open Blithfield Reservoir in 1953.

Nicola Woodhouse

Walks

Around Huddlesford – April



On a brilliant spring morning, a group of 16 members took advantage of the glorious weather for a circular walk based on Whittington village. This is the resting place of Thomas Spencer of Marks & Spencer's.

The start of the walk took us past the modern eye-catching entrance to St Giles Hospice and Bit End Field Reactional Area before reaching the Coventry Canal. The canal borders the East side of the village. It was opened in 1790 to connect Coventry with the Trent & Mersey Canal to exploit the potential of Warwickshire coalfields. Amazingly it still paid dividends right up to 1947; the year before the canals were taken under the Government's wing. The towing path provides views of the tranquil countryside as well as some properties that have taken full advantage of a canal-side back garden.

We left the canal at Bowman's Bridge. This is just East of the junction with the Wyrley & Essington Canal that Lichfield & Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust is in the process of making available for navigation. A major act of faith but probably nothing compared to the challenges the canal enthusiasts of the 1960s faced.

The middle sections of the walk, down quiet country lanes and across farmland, were the juxtaposition of two images. Lovely English countryside and the civil engineering for an elevated section for the HS2 project. This prompted much discussion about the merits or otherwise of HS2. Based on the conversations I had and overheard HS2 has, amongst other things, a PR problem.

On the return leg, we strolled leisurely towards Whittingham with fine views of St Giles church spire.



Back at The Dog Inn, we had a very good lunch to complete an excellent day out. Thanks to Gill for organising the walk and lunch, as well as selecting a day with glorious weather.

Graham Ferry

Broadhill Revisited - May

The timing for a Broadhill walk was better than last year for not only were the rhododendrons and azaleas out in full bloom the bluebells were still trying to put on a show and the sun shone.



We started at the Boat Inn, once a staging post for the Shropshire Fly Boats and now a drinking hole for our leader, John Hibbs. Once over the canal bridge and down onto the towpath we walked north alongside the Shropshire Union canal for about a half mile, passing the Navigation Inn and Cotton Mill and up onto the old railway line (now called the "Way for the Millennium")

John retold his story about arriving in the village some 35 years ago and rejecting the Navi. because, although it was a canal pub, it was decked out in celebration of HMS Victory. Stories about The Boat and the Mill followed. Cotton Mill was built by the Wilder family in 1833 and ceased working as a coal-fired flour mill before 1914. Its claim to be the source of self-raising flour is unfortunately unfounded.

We took coffee at the Crows Nest picnic site before walking up onto Broadhill. We were shown a picture of Beffcote Mill and told the story about there being two windmills but due to lack of wind one was pulled down. None of this is true, there is no evidence of two windmills. However, Beffcote Mill

was in existence in the 1830s and by 1883 it was being used as a dwelling. The building then lay derelict for sixty years until its conversion into a modern house in 1971, known as “The Coffee Pot” due to its shape. After taking the bridle path around the back of the Coffee Pot we dropped down off Broadhill to a track which took us back to the railway line. Here, to avoid stiles, a small group took the railway line straight back while the rest of us took a parallel path through woods, crossed a field and climbed down the steps before joining the railway line back to The Boat for lunch.

Hilary Maggs

Belvide Reservoir and Priory Trail – June

Frustrated by farmers growing crops over public footpaths this walk was not quite as described on the tin. We did not get sight of the reservoir but we did get to walk on tracks and country lanes in brilliant sunshine from the Oakley Arms to Black Ladies and back.

Black Ladies is a Grade II listed house, deep in Staffordshire country. Within the grounds of the house are the remains of the former Black Ladies Priory founded around 1150 by, it is thought, Roger de Clinton. This small, often struggling priory was eventually dissolved by Henry VIII in 1538 and brought by the Clifford family, from nearby Chillington Hall, for £138 1s 8d.



The Cliffords built Black Ladies in a mixture of Tudor and Jacobean styles and it remained, largely, in their ownership until 1918 when it was sold for £1.8 million. The house was again sold in 2002 for an undisclosed amount. Within the grounds the tutor barn, also Grade II listed, and the stable block have been converted into desirable homes. The duck pond is fed by a tributary of the River Penk and this in turn feeds into the Belvedere Reservoir, which unfortunately remained unseen behind crops and trees.

Despite not being able to complete the walk that Janet and Pam had

prepared we had an excellent walk to a hidden gem followed by a good lunch in an excellent pub. Thank you both.

John Hibbs

Rudyard Lake – July

Margaret, a Yorkshire lass, took eleven of us around Rudyard Lake on one of her favourite walks.

We started at Hotel Rudyard, where after booking our lunches, we took an uneven path through Rea Cliffe Wood. Here, only tantalising views of the lake could be seen, soon however after passing a substantial, but neglected gothic-styled building the trees thinned to reveal a large castle-like house with stunning views across the lake.

Margaret gave us a brief history of Cliffe Park Hall and its associated gatehouse, both Grade 11 listed, but now in great need of some TLC. The hall was built in 1811 by a local merchant John Haworth, in a neo-Gothic style. In 1831 the hall and parklands passed to Fanny Bostock, who prevented the North Staffordshire Railway from exploiting the lake commercially. Eventually, the hall was bought by Brian Daley in 1969 but unfortunately, he died in 2015 following an aggravated burglary. Since then, Cliffe Park Hall has been left to crumble. Margaret referred us to “The Internet” where a full history of the hall can be found. including photos of the inside and outside. Interestingly, when the hall was a YHA, George Orwell stayed there researching “The Road To Wigan Pier”.

We moved on, only stopping at the bridge over the stream which feeds the lake, for the traditional coffee break and for birders to spot a nuthatch.



We walked back using the track of the old Macclesfield to Uttoxeter line which fell foul of the Beeching Axe in the 1960s. This track is now shared with the Leek & Rudyard Railway, one of Britain’s great little steam railways. We crossed the dam, built in 1797 to create the lake and provide water for the newly opened Calder and Trent and Mersey Canals, and stopped to admire the carved sculpture of

Carlos Trowe. In September 1864 Carlos Trowe crossed the lake on a tightrope carrying a boy on his back. In 2016 Chris Bull re-enacted the event,

150 years after Carlos but without a boy. The sculpture carved by Anthony Hammond was unveiled in April 2016.

Thank you, Margaret, for sharing your walk with us.

John Hibbs

Norbury Junction – August

On a cloudy but pleasant morning in August, 12 of us met at Norbury Junction. Going north we set off along the towpath by the Shropshire Union Canal. After walking through a deep cutting, we went up a slope to a lane then onto a bridleway through unspoilt countryside. We passed the site of Norbury Manor (about 1300), the only remains being the moat which



surrounded it. From there back to Norbury Junction.

The second part of the walk took us along a lane past the Birmingham Institute of Forest Research facility where they are doing experiments into the effect of carbon dioxide on trees (*see BIFOR Visit report*). We then continued into beautiful Shelmore Wood.

The last part of our walk was along a quiet country lane from which we rejoined the canal on a high embankment. Returning after approximately 4 ½ miles to the pub at Norbury.

Many thanks to Graham for organising such a delightful and varied walk.

Judy Brass

Stone Town – September

A large group of walkers assembled at The Star for a sunny, autumn walk around several of Stone's points of interest. We began by crossing to Westbridge Park to look at the old stone, Grade II listed, Walton Bridge – medieval with 17c elements. Onto the new bridge to cross Crown Meadows towards the old "Workhouse" – now smart apartments. Joining the canal tow-path again we could see a very active Stone Boatyard, then the Workhouse Bridge, where, looking down we could see the sculpture commemorating Christine Collins. She was brutally murdered and thrown

overboard, having taken passage to London on one of the canal boats in July 1839. We passed the boatyard and saw the almost completed new theatre and bar complex, which should be a great asset to the town. We then passed the Old Joule's Brewery Warehouse (now an engineering works), and further along the canal, we learned that the Trent & Mersey canal was begun in Stone and then engineered in both directions from there. Leaving Stone centre and canal, we took a footpath towards Outlanes, and then into a wood where we stopped for a coffee break. Here was "common land" where each person of Stone has the right to graze two sheep! Past Alleyne's School; across the A520 to Mill Street where we could see two mills. One was a flint mill, used for milling flint for the Potteries, and made famous by its inclusion in the TV programme "Restoration Man". The other was said to be the original mill to grind flour for Hovis bread. A short walk then returned us to The Star, past the precincts of St Michaels Church; where we ate a well-earned lunch in good company. It was a pleasure to have some "non-walkers" join us there too. We must thank Nigel, ably assisted by his two sons for a well-researched walk with many interesting features along the way. An excellent way to share a Thursday with friends.



Dave Brass

Visits

BIFOR – April

Organiser – Sue Willis

Our first visit of the year was fully booked on the day when we went to see Birmingham University's giant FACE experiment (Free Air Carbon Dioxide



Enrichment). Currently, this is the largest FACE experiment in the world until Brazil opens its project later this year. They are all part of an international programme to measure the effect of increased CO₂ emissions on different types of forests. BIFoR is temperate woodland, another in Australia is a Eucalyptus Forest and Brazil will be the rain forest. Scientists will be able to use the results to model the effect of CO₂ emissions on the world climate according to woodland type.

We were met in the car park by our guide, Dr. Samantha Dobbie, who gave us an introduction to the facility before we donned our hard hats and hi-vis before setting off into the forest.



The experiment is conducted by measuring the effect of increased CO₂ levels on trees encircled by towers installed in 30-metre wide rings as high as the forest canopy. There are control sites as well, so that a like-for-like comparison can be measured. Carbon dioxide is pumped into the woodland through pipes and directed up the towers onto individual trees.

The level of CO₂ is increased to the level expected in 2050 to measure the effect on trees and surrounding vegetation at that time. 2050 was chosen as a timescale imaginable by most people.

Results so far show that leaves absorb more carbon through photosynthesis when CO₂ levels increase. The amount of carbon absorbed is up by 30% compared to current levels. About half of this is absorbed into the tree. The CO₂ used is a by-product of fertiliser production. The war in Ukraine has forced costs up so BIFoR are investigating the use of CO₂ created using anaerobic fermentation. Both types have a unique molecular footprint so scientists can trace the CO₂ throughout the experiment. Lots of different experiments are being carried out to discover effects on different parts of the ecosystem. Results at Norbury suggest trees are prompted to

generate more mycelium in the soil, which tends to provide nutrients for trees and improve water retention. The opposite is true in the Australian eucalyptus forest – where water retention is impaired.

The effect on pathogens is mixed. Trees become more resistant to pathogens due to increased photosynthesis but some pathogens are more virulent. Plants take in 1 in 3 CO₂ molecules released through the burning of fossil fuels. The aim is to examine the effect of increased CO₂ on all organisms in the forest ecosystem - do the trees grow faster, locking away more carbon, or will changes in the soil and insect life cause problems?

Learning about the effects of increased CO₂ will help us plant woodland most likely to survive and thrive in the future.

Many thanks to Dr Sam for an excellent tour of a fascinating experiment and to Sue Willis for organising a very informative and interesting visit.

John Willis

Packwood House & Baddesley Clinton – June



Organiser – Pam Page

All aboard for our first coach visit of the season, using Elcock Reisen for the first time, as our carrier. 24 members set off in good weather to the first of our two-stop trip to Warwickshire.

Our driver made good time and we arrived earlier than scheduled leaving lots of time for a first cuppa before venturing out into the property.



Packwood house is a timber-framed Tudor manor house which was originally built in the 16th century, but its interiors were extensively restored between the First and Second World Wars by Graham Baron Ash to create a 20th-century recollection of Tudor architecture. It was taken on by the National Trust in 1941.

The house contains a fine collection of 16th-century textiles and furniture, and

the gardens have renowned herbaceous borders and a famous Yew Garden containing over 100 trees which was laid out in the mid-17th century.

We were given a guided tour of the garden which took about an hour after which we had time for lunch before we boarded the coach for the short ride to Baddesley Clinton.

Baddesley Clinton is a moated manor house with late medieval, Tudor and 20th-century histories. Home to the Ferrers family for 500 years. Whilst looking around the house we came upon a guide who enthusiastically told the story of Nicholas Brome (the man who committed two murders) and explained in graphic detail what 'might have' happened.



Nicholas, John Brome's second son, avenged his father's murder by killing another man, John Hertill, in a duel in 1471. He received a lenient punishment: to pay for a priest to say daily prayers for the souls of both his father and John Herthill, and pay Herthill's widow 33 shillings and fourpence. Nicholas inherited Baddesley on his mother's death in 1483 and the right to appoint the parish priest. In 1478 he appointed William Foster to the position. Seven years later Nicholas returned home unexpectedly to find Foster in Baddesley's parlour, stroking his wife under her chin. He flew into a rage, drew his sword and killed the priest. The guide pointed to the 'exact spot' where 'blood stains' could still be seen. As penance, Nicholas raised the church's height and built the Packwood Church's tower. The two towers are known as the 'Towers of Atonement'.

In 1496 Nicholas received a pardon from King Henry VII for the two murders he'd committed. Nicholas died 'extremely humble and penitent' in 1517. In his will, he asked that he be buried 'Within the Church door as the people may tread upon mee as they come into the church'.

What an end to an enjoyable visit. Back on board for the return home, tired, but happy.

Phil Grainger

Staunton Harold Church & Calke Abbey – July

Organiser – Ruth Williams



It was a sunny July morning as members made their way to the meeting point at Staunton Harold church, our first port of call.

Staunton Harold lies just inside the county of Leicestershire and its church dedicated to the Holy Trinity is perhaps one of England's best situated churches set in a beautifully landscaped area with lake and rolling wooded hills as a backdrop. It really is a special place and one of the few churches built during the Commonwealth period consisting of a west tower, nave, north and south aisles and chancel.

It was built in the Gothic style and was the private chapel of the Shirleys who lived in the nearby Hall for generations. Built during the Civil War, Sir Robert Shirley was a Royalist and supporter of the King but he never saw his church completed. Cromwell, on hearing of Shirley's fine church is reported to have asked why he could not pay towards a ship for the Navy when he could afford so fine a building. When he refused, he was arrested and imprisoned in the Tower of London where he died aged 27.



Staunton Harold Hall was used by the Army during World War II and afterwards it was threatened with demolition. The Shirleys could not afford the upkeep or repairs and in 1954 the sold the Hall to Leonard Cheshire Homes and the church was passed to the National Trust.

Most of the party called at the nearby Ferrer's Centre for coffee before going on to Calke Abbey, a stone's throw away.

We were free to explore the house, shop and café before meeting our guide for a tour of the walled garden. It was interesting to walk around the garden and hear how it is being restored to its former glory.

The kitchen gardens and their walls and structures lie to the southeast of the house and are screened by mature planting. They consist of a series of walled areas built around 1775 and a domed orangery.



Everyone was impressed with the vegetable area sporting two or three scarecrows to ward off pigeons and other birds from consuming the harvest. The varieties of gourds hanging down from the archways were amazing, the beetroot looked splendid as did the leeks and we saw several volunteer gardeners tending the rows.

The Calke estate offers miles of walking routes too and if you have never been, do make a note in your diary to pay it a visit before too long. It lies about an hour from the Stafford area and is a treat you simply must not miss.

Ruth Williams

Ludlow Food Festival – September

Organiser – John Willis



On an initially drab looking, but very warm, morning, eighteen of us set off on the coach to Ludlow. Solus Travel had kindly provided a driver also named John to avoid any difficulty in remembering names and by the time we arrived at Ludlow via Wenlock Edge the sun was well out and, after John (the driver) had negotiated some very challenging turns and junctions in Ludlow's medieval streets, we arrived at the castle gates and we stepped out into a steaming 29° to stroll through the gate with our group wristbands.



This festival is unique in that, according to an ancient royal decree, the only produce that can be sold within the castle grounds has to be produced within 50 miles (as the crow flies) from the inner bailey. At least, that's what a guy from Chester told us to justify his presence.

We soon found a spot in the Inner Bailey where we could sample Caribbean patties, Goat curry, burghers and pizzas cooked in a wood-fired oven, housed in a Land Rover. There were plenty of demonstrations going on, ranging from Anna Christoforcu on the Gardens Stage, telling us about Greek food, to Chris Taylor, demonstrating Fire Feasts and backyard baking on the Fire Stage in the Inner Bailey.

Most of us gravitated to the stalls offering free samples of gin, beer, pies and cheese et al and a goodly number found the Hobson's Brewery caravan to while away an hour or two.

Some of us ventured into the picturesque town of Ludlow itself, where the regular market was taking place.

Eventually, we climbed aboard the coach for the trip home to Stafford via Church Stretton, with the air-con turned down to suit the cooler conditions outside, we arrived back in Stafford having had an enjoyable day out.

John Willis

Bookshop Report

The bookshop, at Shugborough, goes from strength to strength! The figures for this year (From 1st March 2023) are excellent. At the end of August, the turnover was recorded at £31,104, with each month beating last year's figures. Looking at the figures since the shop opened it is £163,500 in total, a stunning success for our 'little bookstore'.

Incidentally, the 'lockable cupboard' donated by the Staffordshire Centre, has achieved a sales figure of £1,920 since March 1st. We use this facility to display books that are worth more than the standard fayre and usually quite rare. Sales include a Times Atlas at £195 and two complete sets of 'Harry Potter' first editions, one for £325 and one (in slightly less 'mint condition') for £220.

Our thanks, once more, to the *Staffordshire Centre* for your continued support. Please keep those book donations coming in.

David Goacher

(Lead Bookshop Volunteer, Shugborough)

And Finally

At this stage, I would usually place a spotlight on one of our members, but since this is the last Newsletter, I will be editing, I would like to take this time to thank the members of the committee who have supported me during my time on that committee and to the members for the help in writing pieces for the magazine. I took over from Jean Norman and that was a big role to take on. This job is a bit of a roller coaster, but with help, especially from Patrick Plant and John Willis, I hope the results have been worthwhile.

I wish you all the best and look forward to reading future publications.

Phil Grainger

Many thanks to: -

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