



THE NATIONAL TRUST STAFFORDSHIRE CENTRE

NEWSLETTER

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES FOR SPRING 2010 NEWSLETTER

Every year there is a meeting of representatives of all Centres and Associations in the Region at which we are able to meet Regional and National Officers and learn about developments in the wider Trust. In September Haydn Poulson, George Sweeney and I attended at Charlecote Park and we were impressed that the Trust seems to be making definite strides in becoming less distant and formal. We even seem to be getting the idea over that Centres and Associations need better advertisement nationally - our contributions both financially and socially are certainly appreciated. We heard something of the 'Whose Story' project which I mentioned in the last Newsletter, which is looking at four West Midlands properties from an outsider's point of view and have invited Glenis Williams, one of the organisers, as a guest to our forthcoming Annual Lunch to tell us more about it.

I write this report with a mixture of relief and regret. Relief that, after many years on the Committee and being Chairman for the last seven, I will be free of my NT duties after I retire at the AGM. Not that these have been onerous but they have involved much time and effort. I feel regret because I will no longer be in close contact with my friends on the Committee and others in the Trust. I have said many times that I would not have continued so long if I had not enjoyed their fellowship and the pleasure of being able to help in the organisation.

The Centre will continue to operate very well without me. You have an excellent hard working and happy Committee and your Chairman elect, Haydn Poulson has my full confidence. Margaret and I hope to keep in touch by continuing our membership of the Centre for a long time to come.

Eric Tanner

STAFFORDSHIRE CENTRE COMMITTEE

At the moment the Committee is fortunate to have a full complement of 12 members. However in April our Chairman, Eric Tanner, retires so leaving us short of one member.

Would you consider giving a little of your time to furthering the work of the Centre and the National Trust by joining the Committee? You certainly would be most welcome and your input much appreciated. If you have any queries about our meetings and the work we do, just contact any member of the Committee who will be pleased to talk with you. Members' names, addresses and telephone numbers can be found on the back of the Newsletter.

Our meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month. During the summer months they take place in the evening and during the winter months in the afternoon. We aim to finish all Committee business and to enjoy an informal chat over tea and cakes, within two hours.



The Committee January 2010

NEW MEMBERS

We welcome the following new members who have joined the Centre since September 2009.

Mrs D. Garside	Stafford
Mrs P. Greenlay	Stafford
Mr & Mrs J. Hale	Stafford
Mrs D. Harrison	Stafford
Mr & Mrs P. Wells	Stafford

Joan Jobling, Membership Secretary

DEPARTURES

Dear Mrs Jobling,

Thank you for the Newsletter and invitation to apply for our renewal of membership of the National Trust Staffordshire Centre.

Sadly I have to report that a deterioration of my health means that I could not take part in any future activities, and so will not renew our membership.

I would like to wish every success to your future plans. Please pass on my best wishes to those whom we used to know well.

Mary and myself came to regard a National Trust holiday as a highlight in the year. We have wonderful memories of many wonderfully well-researched and meticulously planned expeditions. Many thanks to those who put in the work to arrange everything.

Finally, let me say that we are very happy in this magnificent part of England, have many friends and will always be pleased to hear from, or better still, welcome for a meal and a chat any members who care to call.

Our very best wishes

Copsford, Sledgates, Fylingthorpe, Whitby, YO22 4TZ

Mary and Edmund Hardwick

Eileen Sessions

It was recently reported that Eileen had died. Eileen was well known in the County as a school head-teacher and, as a golf champion, she did much to encourage the junior golfer. A keen conservationist she was a member of the Centre committee for several years holding in turn the positions of Programme Secretary and General Secretary. She was very much involved in setting up the volunteer arrangements for the Tower of the Winds and the Chinese House at Shugborough and much of the historical information now on display in these monuments was obtained by her.

SOMERSET HOLIDAY 2009

Day 1 - Friday 11th September

The glass was set fair and was forecast to hold for the weekend. Members new and old and several visitors joined Eric Tanner, our leader, on the Happy Days coach at Stafford, Rugeley and Lichfield whence we travelled via M42 and M5 to Bristol for a 3 hour tour of Brunel's SS Great Britain.

What a splendid start to the holiday! After a simulated dip 'under water' to inspect the hull and it's preservation, we passed into the shore based museum where the four phases of the life of the ship were displayed and explained in detail:-

1. The pioneering steel-hulled, steam powered, screw-propelled ocean liner (with auxiliary sails).
2. The emigrant sailing clipper (with auxiliary steam power, modified from the original for greater efficiency).
3. The windjammer with full sail for economic shipment of bulk cargoes (with boilers, engine and propeller removed).
4. Finally, a stripped and bleached hull left in the Falklands as a coal bunker (whence it was eventually rescued and returned to its birthplace in Bristol docks).



*Memories of Somerset
The Roman Baths in Bath*

It was tempting to spend too much time in the museum before boarding the ship itself and exploring decks, cabins, engines and getting a feel for what life on this extraordinary vessel must have been like. As we paced the decks on this warm sunny day the Bristol Floating Dock was alive with ferry boats, sailing dinghies and passenger tripper boats. I for one hadn't seen everything before it was time to move on to the next venue.

This was the so-called King John's Hunting Lodge at Axbridge, a late sixteenth century timber framed house, one of several in this attractive small village on the edge of the Mendip hills. The house is owned by NT and run as a museum by the local history and archaeological society who kindly opened it for our visit and provided a guide who was kept busy answering our questions. Due to the restricted size of the rooms and staircases, we split into two groups, one to tour the house whilst the other took tea in a nearby cafe (again opened for our benefit).

A short distance from Axbridge along the A38 we reached our hotel at Huntspill (near Bridgewater) and quickly settled into routine of our new home for the weekend.

Alan Jutton



*Memories of Somerset
SS Great Britain*

Day 2

Another beautiful sunny day to continue our travels in Somerset. We arrived at Hestercombe Gardens at about 10 o'clock and wandered at our leisure through a unique collection of three gardens. A full circuit can take about two hours so we decided to take the shorter route up through the woodland garden past the Great Cascade, grottos, lakes and temples. This Georgian Landscape was a delightful experience in the dappled sunshine. The formal gardens consisted of the Victorian Terrace which was very colourful and the Edwardian Formal Garden which is considered to be the finest example of the famous partnership between Sir Edward Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll. These gardens were a breathtaking sight with beautiful flowers and well kept lawns.

Before going to our second venue we had a lunch stop in Wiveliscombe. This normally quiet little town had quite a continental feel to it in the warm sunshine as this particular Saturday there was a Ten Parishes festival with interesting stalls lining the narrow streets and lots of happy people. There were local fruits and vegetables, antiques and handmade jewellery for sale and children "bobbing" for apples. We had a tasty lunch in The White Hart - omelette or sandwiches washed down with local cider or beer.

Then on to Knightshayes Court just a short drive away. It was the home of the Heathcote Amery family, owners of the largest lace - making enterprise in the world. The building of Knightshayes began in 1869, was completed in five years and remained within the family until 1972 when it was given to the National Trust. The wonderful teak staircase was most impressive as was the dining room which was panelled entirely in walnut. Knightshayes Court seemed very much a family home - lived in all the year round and never left empty and desolate for parts of the year like some large houses. It still gives a warm and welcoming atmosphere to all who visit it.

We had a most enjoyable day with perfect weather and lovely scenery to enjoy as we drove through the Somerset countryside. Thank you Eric and Margaret for a superb time.

Margaret Trigg
Pat Andrews

Day 3

It was another bright day when we set out westwards along the A39 between the sea and the Quantock hills and turned off for Torre and the cider farm where we would be able to taste the samples and perhaps make our purchases. Nearby a handsome goat lay sunning itself on a chicken house roof. There was time for coffee and a wander over to look at a big Gloucester Old Spot sow and some of her progeny basking in their stalls.

Then it was a very short drive to Cleve Abbey, set in a wide peaceful valley with a river running through. Although Henry VIII razed the abbey church one can still see the outlines of its walls, and the bases of the eight huge stone columns that used to stand in the nave. The rest of the monastic buildings remain amazingly preserved and unaltered; it was possible to explore the gatehouse with its carvings, the dormitory with a great roof, chambers for visitors and the abbot's apartments.

At lunchtime the coach took us first to Dunster, where some of the party decided to look for lunch in the old town with its cobbled pavements and market hall, while the rest of us were taken on to Minehead to enjoy the sea before being picked up again to go to Dunster Castle.



*Memories of Somerset
Dunster Castle*

The ancient castle, on a steep wooded hill, has been there since at least Norman times and though much battered during its history it was the home of the Luttrell family for some 600 years, and remodelled in 1868-72 by Antony Salvin. We were first directed to the medieval gatehouse and then on to the terrace, giving wonderful views over the river far below and the Bristol Channel beyond. Inside there is much to admire and we were told of a major project now completed enabling the castle to be the National Trust's first Grade I listed building to have solar panels installed which will provide up to 20% of its energy needs and save tons of carbon dioxide emissions.

After such a busy day we were back to the hotel for dinner, during which a presentation was made to Eric and Margaret to say thank you for a well planned and thoroughly enjoyable holiday. And then we went on to play skittles!

Jean Humphreys

Day 4 - The last day of the Somerset holiday

We woke on Monday morning to a cooler day due to some cloud cover and although this was the day we were to return home, the journey would only be a small part of the day. Everyone was so well organised that we were waving goodbye to the hotel as we left five minutes early, our first stop being the famous Wookey Hole caves near Wells.

I remember the caves from childhood but above ground they are unrecognisable. It is now a theme-park and entertainment complex aimed at the younger generation with the caves as a minor attraction. As the children were all back at school, the place was deserted and even the witch was going off-duty, but a guide was produced and a large group of us ventured underground to marvel at what the river Axe had carved out over all those thousands of years.

An hour later and we were on the move again, this time to visit Bath and its many points of interest, historical, architectural and with a touch of gastronomic and retail therapy thrown in. Having been before and sampled the first two we searched out Sally Lunn's Refreshment House and Museum and still had plenty of time to spend too much in an M & S which you could get lost in!

The actual journey home seemed easy and with one stop and no hitches we were back in Stafford by eight p.m. after a very full and enjoyable long weekend in Somerset organised in their usual superb fashion by the Eric and Margaret team upon whom we have come to rely. They even got the weather exactly right too? How do they manage it?

Peter and Deidre Rowney



*Memories of Somerset
Jean photographing a goat (on a roof)*



*Memories of Somerset
The goat posing for Jean*

SEPTEMBER RAMBLE FROM THORPE

Leaving Thorpe car park, it was up and over the hill to Fenny Bentley and into St Edmunds Church where we discovered 'two puzzles'.

Inside the church is an amazing alabaster tomb of St Thomas Beresford and his wife Agnes which dates from the fifteenth century. It is one of the few tombs in this country whose effigies are covered in burial shrouds. The reason for this appears to be lost in time. The Beresfords had 16 sons and 5 daughters whose effigies, also in shrouds, are on the sides of the tomb.

The highly decorated and painted ceiling of the Chapel of St Edmunds is dedicated to the Beresford family and has been painted on aluminium and dates from the late 1800's. This is one of the first known church uses of aluminium. Why this material was used also seems to be a puzzle.

It's uphill almost all the way from Fenny Bentley to Tissington and at the highest point before you drop down into the village **'there is an enclosed area planted with a variety of trees. Two of these trees had, adjacent to them, small plaques enclosed in a horseshoe. Each bore a delightful verse, one commemorating Kenneth Unwin and one Paul Greator. The residents of Tissington had also erected a stone pillar in the area to commemorate the Millennium. The views from this peaceful spot were superb-what a lovely idea.'**

Then, **on entering Tissington, we came across a yard where a clock restoration business was operating. A lady was 'rubbing down' one of the 7ft diameter clock faces from Shuttleworth Hall. She explained that the faces would be repainted before the gold leaf was applied to the numerals using size as the adhesive and adding, 'none of these modern adhesives are used in this business!'**

Further into the village is Tissington Hall. **'Also of interest is the clock on the stable block. It was made by John Whitehurst [1713-1788] of Derby, and is one of the oldest clocks still in working order in Derbyshire. It has a single stone face.'**

Where are the wells for which Tissington is so famous?

There are six of them. **'Top of the village Wades Well; like a bath or a horse trough. By the wall of the clock restorer; Children's Well, tiny for tots or Jack and Jill. Half way down the main street wall; Wall Well, unimpressive especially when undressed – only dressed for Ascension and thereabouts. Bottom of the village; Town Well, really smart, looks like a boathouse and beautifully clear water. Can't find Coffin Well up behind the church [Jean is waving us on – perhaps just as well!] Here's Yew Well- not well placed under the poisonous yew – the water green and vile. Ugh! Now safely out – all's well that ends well.'**

And so, having passed an hour or two exploring the village, we walked out along the avenue and across fields to return to our cars.

Contributions in bold print and in the right order by David Wakelin, Judy-Anne Wakelin, Sue and Harry Potter, Derek Jones, Peter Jobling and John Loughran.



Our party at Thorpe



7ft clock face being cleaned

WALK AT AQUALATE

About 25 people set off on a lovely autumn morning from The Swan at Forton, on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border. We passed the impressive redbrick Hall and the Church, then into the fields of the Aqualate estate. These fields are low lying and marshy, but we were lucky as it had been quite dry. The Mere was hidden from view by trees - there is a heronry here. We went over a tiny, old humped back bridge over a stream and into the woods. Here we saw the English Nature notice board with a map of the area. wonderful autumn colours here and a carpet of fallen leaves. I just glimpsed some deer as they flashed across our path. Out in to the fields again and we found a carved wooden bird sign leading us to the bird hide. Here we had a wonderful view down the Mere, which was covered in birds - Canada geese, mallards, coots, seagulls etc. At the far end there is a nesting site for cormorants and you can see them perched on the dead trees if you have binoculars. Having had our coffee stop we started back down the lane towards Sutton. Crossing the old canal bridge, where we stopped for group photos. (There are plans to reopen part of this canal between Newport and Shrewsbury). Near Sutton we turned back into the fields again, with buzzards 'mewing' and circling overhead. We made our way back to The Swan for a delicious lunch. Thank you Joyce and Margaret for an enjoyable day.

(If you would like to visit the bird hide again there is a car park off the A518 (Stafford-Newport road). About 3 miles after Gnosall, turn right for Sutton at the Wilbrighton crossroads - the car park is about half a mile on the left. Then follow the wooden bird signs through the fields for about 10/15 minutes).

Simon and Helen Air

HISTORY OF MOSELEY OLD HALL

Malcolm Astley has been a tour guide for Moseley Old Hall for fifteen years. His passion concerning 16th and 17th century history became obvious as he shared with us an insight into the history of the various manors within this area of Staffordshire. We heard of the turbulent times of Civil War in England and its impact on the loyalist sympathisers who owned the manor house.

Charles II, then the Prince of Wales owed his life to Thomas Whitgreave and Father John Huddleston, the Chaplain to the Whitgreave family who lived at Moseley Old Hall, Fordhouses, near Wolverhampton. They sheltered him in great secrecy following defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. They housed him for a few days then enabled his passage to France, safety and exile via a southerly criss-cross route to avoid the Parliamentarians. These were dangerous times as soldiers supporting Cromwell combed the area. Catholic safe house owners risked everything to protect Catholic Royalists. Hiding-holes in unlikely places under stairs, behind fire places and wooden panels were vital ruses to this end. Charles II on his restoration in 1660 gave Thomas Whitgreave an annuity of £200 per year, a large sum in those days.

Moseley Old Hall is an Elizabethan building built by William Pitt in 1600. Sadly the beautiful black and white illustrations we were showed of the grand house in its wattle and daub days is no longer. Brick was considered to be a more luxurious material in the past so was employed to replace the former outer construction in the 19th century.



Moseley Old Hall

The Elizabethan windows were also replaced. The building fell into decline (partly the result of subsidence), and it was given to the National Trust in 1962. the Whitgreave family lived there until 1925. Moseley Old Hall has been carefully 'brought back to life', and is to be appreciated as a fine three story building of character, steeped in the history of our area.

Inside we can delight in a plethora of oak beams and huge fire places, dark wood panelling, and hefty pieces of oak furniture. the ceilings are low and the mood created is quite eerie especially as portraits of the King, the priest and the Whitgreave ancestry stares down at you as you circumnavigate the dwelling. Outside, the garden of Moseley Old Hall has been recreated in a 17th century style with a formal box parterre surrounded on 3 sides by an arbour. Only 17th century plants are grown here.

Our thanks go to Michael for a fascinating talk. Alongside knowledge of Moseley Old Hall he also reminded us of the huge contribution the National Trust has made in preserving our Heritage over the comparatively few years of its existence. It is so sad when buildings we have loved have been demolished (without public consultation) in the interest of 'progress'. Thank goodness for the National Trust.

Pam Cartwright

A RAMBLE AROUND WESTON

After unpleasant weather the previous day we arrived at Weston under blue skies, a lovely autumn sun and the prospect of a fair morning for our walk. We were 18 in number and set off in good spirits. I played back marker as Jean and I had reconnoitred the route in bits and pieces and (fortunately) she had the route clearly mapped out.

The first thing that caught my eye was the name of a cottage we passed on the lane to the canal. "Nutters Platt" seemed to be a name which must have some significance and it does. A "nutter" is an official cobnut picker and a "platt" is a plantation for growing cobnuts. Apparently there are still a few of both in Kent.

We crossed the canal and the railway in quick succession and made our way through a field of mushrooms and some pleasant pastures to Gayton church where we stopped for morning coffee. Then on through the village past a house selling Jerusalem artichokes and medlars, both somewhat unusual items, and alongside a garden boasting some rather ornate garden constructions in the form of a grotto, a loggia and balustrades around the patio. The map told us there had once been fishponds and a moat and the embankments were still evident.

We then encountered an extremely muddy section near the farm which entailed a bit of bog hopping, circled our way back to the church and from there headed towards the Sandon estate. The aptly named Monument Plantation contained just that in the shape of an obelisk erected in 1806 to William Pitt. This path, part of the Stone Circles Challenge walk, took us across the busy A51 and back onto the canal path. From here we had an easy stroll along the towpath, past narrow boats and houseboats guarded by tigers, tiger cubs and other plastic animals to the Saracens Head and a well-deserved lunch.

Thanks to Jean for leading and organising and to the weather for keeping us dry.

Pat Dudal

CHRISTMAS WALK FROM SLITTING MILL

A group of 27 met at The Horns on a cool dry morning and started off by walking along the road to a path onto The Chase that took us near to the Forestry Centre in Birches Valley. We did not go to the visitor centre as there were many children on school outings to meet Santa. There were also many people buying or looking at Christmas Trees. We then took a path towards where there are forestry trails and also 'Going Ape High Wire Forest Adventure at Cannock Chase' unfortunately it was not operating so no one could give us a demonstration of the activities available. It may be interesting to visit this site when the weather is better and it is operating.

From there we continued towards Fairoak Lodge and again not actually reaching it before turning back towards the start and passing the "chain" of pools that were formed in Stoney Brook when the area was a hive of activity and very industrialised with metal working hence the name "Slitting Mill" where the iron was worked.

We then returned to The Horns for a well-deserved lunch. We must thank Brian, Hilary and Joyce for organising the walk and the lunch.

Derek Jones



Same crowd, same place - one year older!

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