

WARWICKSHIRE GARDENS TRUST



NEWS AND VIEWS- ISSUE 1

The estate manager at Arbury Hall was kind enough to grant us an interview recently. Our wide-ranging discussions covered some of the many challenges of his role. Adam Weaver was trained as a chartered surveyor; he studied at the Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester but originally never intended to work as a land agent. After a job in the West Country, however, he worked on an estate in Yorkshire before taking up his current role in 2008. There are numerous aspects to his work, from managing the commercial property, to structural duties, to forestry, to the maintenance of the hall and grounds and the operation of the farms. He sees himself as needing to be a 'jack of all trades'. He joked that he was a hundred years too late to be able to stride or ride around the estate. Now much of his day is spent looking at a screen rather than a view!

Arbury Hall is under no obligation to open to the public, but chooses to do so eight days a year, around Bank Holidays. It also opens regularly to groups, who are able to organize for drinks and meals to be served in the Tea Room inside the beautiful old stables building. This is on the first floor, which presents some challenges. There are no specialist garden guides, but those who guide inside the house are part of a knowledgeable and loyal team.

There are 20 acres of gardens and three full time gardeners manage the work, bringing in specialists where needed. The borders, many of which are sheltered by walls, and beds are often planted in greens and whites at the request of the family. While we visited, the white magnolias and huge swathes of daffodils were echoed in the planting of lead containers by the buildings, using just green, white and pale yellow.

There are forty rose beds, which are a special feature of the garden. These are continually renewed and refreshed. Against a backcloth of climbing wisteria which clambers up the old brick, there are circlets of climbing roses on a raised brick and stone terrace; this whole area is bordered by yew hedges. The original invoice for these very same plants is still in existence and shows that they were planted in 1692.



One of the great appeals of Arbury is the use of water. This originally stems from the canal system which was used to transport coal locally. Now the cascades, lakes, ponds, streams and pools serve to create a stunning setting for the buildings. Beyond the heart of the estate there are acres of woodland. These are being managed to encourage sustainability and diversity. Recently a large area of larch was ready for felling; it was decided to follow modern good practice and plant a mixture of British hardwoods, interspersed with some softwoods, to provide trees that would reach maturity at different times and to leave open some areas for other habitats.

Arbury has been able to keep a vibrant eco system in place. The avenue of limes is visited by large numbers of wild bees which support pollination. In season, they apparently fill the air with sound! There is something to enjoy at all times of the year and certainly looked stunning, even on a damp day in March.

Arbury Hall is located south west of Nuneaton. The post code is CV10 7NF. We hope to organize a trip there quite soon, but it is open to the public on 27th and 28th August from 1pm to 6pm.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARBURY HALL

The Arbury estate saw three major changes in its history, the last in 1586 when the Newdigate family purchased the house and land, giving continuity, stability and industrial success for 450 years.

A Priory of Augustinian canons was founded in the reign of Henry II by Roger de Sudeley. In 1536, part of the Dissolution, the Priory was granted to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk (d.1545). In 1567, Arbury gained a new owner, a lawyer and Chief Justice, Sir Edmund Anderson, who demolished the Priory and constructed an Elizabethan house within the remains of its cloisters. A hint of the formal 17th-century garden layout can be found in a painting of Lettice Newdigate, dated c.1606, which portrays a knot garden patterned in a similar style to Lettice's dress, a domed arbour and a fountain encircled by flower beds.

A new chapter in Arbury's history began in 1586 when Anderson sold the estate to another lawyer, John Newdigate, whose son was made a Baronet in 1677. At the end of the 17th century, John's grandson Richard Newdigate (2nd Baronet), began to investigate the estate's coal deposits, canalising the streams from the Hall Pool south of the house,



enabling small craft to carry timber from Arbury's woods to the local coalmines. Sir Richard commissioned Sir Christopher Wren to draw up designs for the imposing entrance to the stable block, which appears in the Beighton drawing of 1708. The drawing also shows the remodelling of the formal gardens around the house. Garden books in the Arbury archive reveal that plants were ordered from the curator of the Oxford Physic Garden, Jacob Bobart, and from the Superintendents of the Royal gardens, George London and Henry Wise.

The 5th Baronet, Roger Newdigate, inherited Arbury in 1734 and made many alterations to the house and garden which can still be viewed today. Sir

Roger began by changing the Elizabethan house into a Gothic mansion in 1750, with advice and drawings from his architect friend, Sanderson Miller (1716-1780). David Hiorn, a mason and contractor from Warwick working on the house in 1748, also designed and erected ornamental



garden buildings - a rotunda, an orangery and a tea house. By 1751, a cascade had been constructed in front of the house. The Hall was remodelled again in 1769-73, its new Gothic interiors enhanced with plaster fan-vaulted ceilings and filigree tracery. Not to be forgotten, the earlier coal-mining and canal-building enterprises increased under Sir Roger's stewardship, linking Arbury with the Coventry Canal system, the Baronet becoming one of the foremost eighteenth-century advocates of canal transport.

In the 19th and 20th centuries few alterations were made to the house and garden. The estate continued to be owned and managed by the Newdigate family, while in 1882 the mines moved into ownership by the Griff Colliery Co. Ltd. In WW1 the Park saw use as a prisoner of war camp, after which the estate passed to Humphrey Fitzroy Newdegate (3rd Viscount Daventry), who agreed in 1953 to open Arbury to the public. Possession of the estate passed in 2000 to his son James (the present 4th Viscount Daventry). He and his family plan to further improve the 100 acres of landscape gardens, parkland and water courses, but they are keen to maintain the historic nature of the estate and its Gothic roots, which have survived under the family's custodianship for 450 years.

Illustrations:

Fig. 1: Arbury Hall, 2009. Photo: Diane James

Fig. 2: Canal Bridge at Arbury Hall, 2017. Photo: Diane James

Sources:

Arbury Hall Website, <https://arburystate.co.uk/arbury-hall-and-estate/> [accessed 14/4/23]

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