

North Staffordshire National Trust Association

Newsletter No. 135

Autumn 2026

www.northstaffsnt.org.uk



Lunch in the Long Gallery at Wentworth Woodhouse © J Spriggs

Arrangements for Trips

Coaches now depart promptly from **Brunswick Street** at the front of the Jubilee Baths. **The car park on School Street is now short stay.** The nearest long stay car park is the public car park next to the Borough Arms Hotel. We do not pick up members en route.

Please send a separate cheque, with the event name on the reverse, and a stamped addressed envelope of at least 8½" x 4" for each event applied for, even if it is with the same organiser. People wishing to sit together should complete one form.

Non-members travelling as members' guests pay an extra £2 for Coach Outings and £1 for car trips. If circumstances dictate they have lower priority booking.

Please make cheques payable to "North Staffs NT Assoc". Cheques are normally not cleared until after an event. We will give notice if we need to do otherwise.

Refunds on cancellation are possible only if there is a waiting list. Please do not find your own substitute travellers: people on the waiting list have priority.

The Committee reserves the right to cancel any event that is not viable.

Whilst participating in an event please make sure that you carry the organiser's mobile phone number from the booking acceptance form in case you get lost. Please **DO NOT MAKE** alternative arrangements to get home without first telling the trip organiser.

This Newsletter is published by North Staffordshire National Trust Association to provide members with information on the forthcoming programme, reports on recent events, and other membership issues. The text and images are copyright and may not be reproduced without the owner's permission. Any views expressed by individual contributors are their own and not necessarily of the NSNTA or the NT. No liability will be accepted for errors or omissions.

We are always delighted to welcome new members – if further details are not in the inserts in the centre of this Newsletter please check a previous issue or on line.

The editor welcomes items of direct relevance to Association activities, and thanks all contributors, with apologies for failure to acknowledge any, particularly if sent by post.

The Newsletter is published in April, August and December. Copy and correspondence for each issue should be addressed to NSNTA.newsletter@outlook.com (01782 791360) by the 15th of the preceding month at the absolute latest (but earlier if possible!)

North Staffordshire National Trust Association

Newsletter No. 135

Autumn 2026 Programme

A Note From The Chair



Who would have thought that we would be blessed with one heat wave after another in the first half of the summer!

Our events started in April with an organised walk through Hem Heath Woods to see a most colourful array of bluebells.

We then continued on a horticultural theme with a very enjoyable full day coach outing to the RHS Malvern Spring Festival. The event covered several acres and showed the best that the horticultural industry had to offer.

Our June outing was another coach trip. This time to see Wentworth Woodhouse, the largest house in the UK in S Yorkshire. The guides brought out the very best in the house and its history.

The very successful Social Lunch in this period was organised by Nicky Adams and held at the Hand and Trumpet in Betley.

There are many more events planned for the remainder of the Summer and into the Autumn which are all detailed in this magazine.

Should you have missed the above events, you have the opportunity to read what our members had to say about them in this magazine.

Have an enjoyable summer

Best wishes

Bob

Data Protection Policy

The North Staffordshire National Trust Association (NSNTA) is a non-profit voluntary organisation which endeavours to comply with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of May 2018.

Personal data collected by us on membership forms, renewal forms and event booking forms will be limited to: names, addresses, email addresses and telephone numbers. It will only be used for: administration of membership, communication of information and organisation of events within and related to the NSNTA.

Personal data will not be shared with the National Trust or any third party, or to other members.

Membership lists are destroyed when 18 months old. Lists relating to specific events are destroyed when the event is complete.

Contact the Membership Secretary if you wish to view/amend/delete any of your personal data.

By providing personal data on our membership forms and event booking forms, you are consenting to this, our Data Protection Policy, and to our stated use of your personal data.

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In order to comply with the terms of GDPR and to improve security and privacy the following policies are being adopted with particular reference to the publishing of details of members organising events. Full leaders' postal addresses will only appear on the booking forms and not in the main text of the magazine, which will just carry email addresses and telephone numbers. The booking forms are included in Newsletters distributed to bona-fide members of NSNTA but will not be contained in copies of the Newsletter posted on the website. Access to back copies of the Newsletter on the website which contain leaders' addresses will be restricted by password, available to members on request.

Attendees of NSNTA events are advised that they may be included in group photographs for publication in the Newsletter or on the website, but they will not be named without their specific permission. If anyone does not want to appear in such photographs, please let the organiser or the editor know.

## ***Forthcoming Events***

*All talks commence at 7:30 p.m. at the North Staffordshire Conference Centre (the Medical Institute), Hartshill Road, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7NY unless otherwise stated.*

Some events book up very early, others more slowly. You can check with the organiser or the STOP PRESS on the web site if events are full or are undersubscribed, or if it has been necessary to change details or booking arrangements, availability etc. or there are other matters which may be of interest. Do let the organiser know if you are interested in an event but can't attend so the feasibility of repeating it on another date can be assessed.

### **Mon 7<sup>th</sup> - Thu 10<sup>th</sup> Sept: Holiday: Royal Residences & Gardens of London.**

All spaces now taken but last minute cancellations will be advertised by email and website. Please let Marion know if you wish to be informed.

### **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September: Heritage Open Days.**

The Heritage Open Days are an annual celebration of history and culture, allowing free entry to sites not always open to the public. These are not organised by NSNTA but by local organisations and volunteers across the nation, endorsed by the main National Trust. Explore the web nearer the time for details: search on Heritage Open Days 2026 Staffordshire for many links to activities, some more useful than others! See 🏠 Heritage Open Days, Stoke-on-Trent, and also 🏠 Heritage Open Days, Staffordshire for a wider coverage.

This year, the small church at Sandon is celebrating 1000 years of worship. They are having several events to mark the occasion. On Sunday 20 September, Sandon church is open for the Heritage Open Days. At 12.45 to 1.30, Mark Goodhew will give an organ recital, he is the organist at Stoke Minster.



### **Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September: Talk: Andrew van Buren: Philip Astley and me.**

Andrew van Buren will talk about the fascinating man who invented the circus, Newcastle-under-Lyme born Philip Astley - the military hero, original ringmaster and father of the modern circus. The story explains who Philip Astley was, why Andrew is interested in Philip Astley and how he has turned Astley into a supportive lifeline for town centre regeneration and investment.

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October: Car outing: Crewe Railway Heritage Museum.

This living museum is virtually on our doorsteps and offers a remarkable journey through railway history explaining how Crewe grew from being farmland to an industrial heavyweight town in just thirty years, becoming the railway capital of the world!



The Heritage Centre houses an extensive collection of diesel & electric locomotives and rolling stock, including the APT-P (Advanced Passenger Train) which is the only surviving prototype of British Rail's tilting high-speed train. In addition, although no steam trains are currently exhibited here, we can get hands-on with the collection of engines, rolling stock & related items and there are several model railway layouts to view. Besides all this we will be able to watch the trains entering and leaving Crewe Station from the viewing area (weather permitting) and take a ride ourselves on a miniature railway.



*Photos : © Crewe Heritage Trust / P Robinson.*



Upon arriving at the centre, between 10.00am and 10.15am, we shall be served with tea/coffee & biscuits, after which we will be given our guided tour by one of the enthusiastic volunteers incorporating a general overview of the site and the town's history, and an introduction to the Crewe Heritage Centre. During the tour, lasting around 45 to 60 minutes, some of the star objects will be highlighted to us. Subject to availability, it may be possible to show live demonstrations of the signalling equipment up inside an original signal box.

We are invited to take our own packed lunches which can be enjoyed at the indoor café tables or the picnic tables in the grounds. The café will also be open in case you wish to purchase snacks, such as hot & cold drinks and confectionery, including chocolate bars and the like. After refreshments there will be ample time to relax or explore the grounds further before the closing time of 4.00pm. Souvenirs will be available from the gift shop.

Please note that the North Junction Signal Box is currently closed to visitors.

The venue address is Crewe Railway Heritage Centre, Vernon Way, Crewe CW1 2DB and the on-site car park is free of charge.

COST: £18 pp (non-NSNTA members: £19) to include entry and a guided tour of the facility with freedom to also view the exhibits at leisure, a ride on the miniature railway, tea/coffee & biscuits on arrival, free on-site parking and a donation to the NSNTA.

Snacks available to purchase, but it is advisable to bring a picnic lunch.

APPLY TO: John Pedrazzini - 07574 599 375 / JohnPedrazzini@yahoo.co.uk

CLOSING DATE FOR APPLICATIONS: Wednesday 9th September 2026. Maximum number: 30 persons.

## **Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> October: Planning meeting at Jane and Richard Mayer's.**

The next planning meeting is to be held in Stockton Brook (details inside back cover) at 2:00 p.m.. Please feel free to bring ideas for future programmes – more ideas and offers of help needed to support Helen and the dwindling team of volunteers putting together our programme. Just call Helen beforehand to say you hope to attend to give an idea of numbers.

## **Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October: Social Lunch at the Hollybush "Ego", Stockton Brook.**

The venue will be at the northern end of the area and members and friends are welcome to join us at the Hollybush - aka Ego Mediterranean - Stanley Road, Stockton Brook ST9 9NL from 12.30pm on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October. We have tables reserved in the conservatory which overlooks the bowling green. There is an extensive menu including a reasonably priced 'Dine out with Ego' menu with reductions for ordering two or three courses from it.

There is a requirement to order in advance for large parties which is becoming more common these days and I will be emailing the autumn menus to those who are coming towards the end of September.

Please reserve your place(s) with Jane Mayer: janemayeruk@yahoo.co.uk or on 07840 171760.

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October: Talk: Ken and Rose Pemberton:  
Sandon church past and present.**

The talk will provide a brief history of this Grade I Listed church as it celebrates its Millenium. It will include the notable families involved and the many rare artefacts in the church. The recent conservation works will be described, they were made possible with the help of the National Heritage Lottery Fund. Full details on the website: [www.sandonallsaints.com](http://www.sandonallsaints.com).



**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> November: Car outing: Soulton Hall, near Wem, Salop. SY4 5RS.**

Built by Sir Rowland Hill, Privy Councillor to four monarchs, this Tudor country house has Renaissance codes woven into the structure and a mysterious priest-hole which is unlikely to have hidden a Roman Catholic priest as Sir Rowland was a devout Protestant and the first Protestant Lord Mayor of London. Tea/coffee and a slice of cake will be served on arrival followed by our exclusive tour which will include the Concealed Chapel, the As You Like It Dancing Pavement, (Hill was a cousin of Shakespeare's mother) the Epidaurus Court and the Wren Steps and will last approximately two hours. Tours are typically led by a member of the family or an expert historian, guaranteeing a thoughtful and insightful experience.

Directions to the hall will be given upon application. Meeting time 10:25am in front of the Hall. Car parking available.

**Cost:** £27 (non-NSNTA members £28) to include guided tour and tea/coffee/cake and a donation to the National Trust.

**Closing date for applications is 14<sup>th</sup> October 2026.** Please apply to Rose Wheat, enclosing the booking form, your cheque and a stamped Self Addressed Envelope for confirmation of booking and directions to the Hall. Enquiries: [rose.wheat@virginmedia.com](mailto:rose.wheat@virginmedia.com)

**Accessibility:** The Hall presents challenges for visitors with access needs as it has no level access and the significant rooms are ranged over several floors without a lift.

**Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> November: Talk: Henry Birks, Shadows and Structures:  
Rediscovering Maurice Wade's Vision of the Potteries.**

Henry Birks of Trent Art Gallery in Newcastle will introduce us to the life and work of Maurice Wade (1917-1991), the Burslem-born artist whose hauntingly beautiful landscapes captured the industrial soul of North Staffordshire. A former teacher who turned professional after the war, Wade used bold palette-knife techniques and sombre, geometric forms to distil local canals, factories, and countryside into powerful, atmospheric scenes that continue to resonate today. Join us for this illustrated talk that explores why Wade's work is enjoying a well-deserved rediscovery.



## Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Lunch at Aston-by-Stone

This year we're returning to Aston Marina but to a new room – the hideaway. We'll enjoy a traditional dining package with a three-course festive set menu including coffee and tea after our meal. There will be Christmas decorations and seasonal background music. Once again Holly Reynolds will entertain us with a song.

We should aim to arrive around 12 noon, giving time to purchase a drink and have a chat before sitting down to eat our lunch at 1 pm.

Numbers are limited so please don't delay in applying for a ticket. You don't want to be disappointed! Please complete a booking form with your choice of food (stating any allergies) and send it with a cheque for £40 to Cynthia Dumbelton at 32 The Lea, ST4 8DY. You can avoid purchasing a postage stamp by telling me you want to come and hand me your form and cheque at the next meeting on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> September at the Institute. My contact details are inside the back cover of our Newsletter.

### **Festive Menu 2026**

#### *Starters:*

Smoked salmon, lemon & dill mousse, pickled fennel & cucumber salad, sourdough croutes GF\*

Smooth duck liver & pork pate, redcurrant, crispy onion, toasted brioche GF\*

Silky cauliflower and truffle velouté, fresh chives, artisan roll GF\* VE\* V

#### *Mains:*

Roast turkey, garlic & thyme roast potatoes, bacon wrapped chipolata, pork, cranberry & sage stuffing, roasted carrots & parsnips, sprouts and braised red cabbage, roast turkey gravy GF\*

Slow-braised feather blade of beef, beef dripping, Yorkshire pudding, garlic & parsley creamed potatoes & rich Rioja jus

Butternut roast, baked butternut squash, lentil and mushroom nut roast, garlic & thyme Hasselback potatoes, roasted carrots & parsnips, sprouts and braised red cabbage, port jus VE\* GF\*

*All served with roasted carrots & parsnips, sprouts & braised red cabbage*

#### *Desserts:*

Warm sticky pudding, spiced fruits, brandy sauce GF\*

Milk chocolate ganache, cherry compote, chocolate and almond soil, cherry liqueur syrup GF\*

Poached festive spiced pineapple, vegan crème patisserie, caramel sauce, coconut ice-cream, toasted coconut crumb GF\* VE\*

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V Vegetarian VE Vegan VE\* Vegan alternative available  
Gluten Free GF\* adaptable to Gluten Free

## *Meet the Committee*

*From time to time we like to introduce a member of our committee to our membership to learn more of the background of those who do such a magnificent job in managing our Association. We are very grateful for all their hard work, and this time it is the turn of **Helen Mansell - Programme Co-ordinator.***

Dear fellow NT supporters! You could say I am a "second-generation member" of our Group, my parents having been a part of the cohort forming the NSNTA 40+ years ago. During the period of time that I've been in the Association, I have very much enjoyed getting to know people at various events. It's also been rewarding to help out in small ways, like writing reports of talks or trips, and it has been fun arranging outings - especially when done together with another member or friend. Hopefully you have good memories of coming along to something I had a hand in arranging - such as walks (around Brown Edge, and Hanford to Stoke Minster), car outings (to St Joseph's Catholic Church & The Leopard pub in Burslem, to Sandon Church, and to Shirley's Flint Mill & Museum), and coach trips (for Robinson's Brewery & The Staircase House in Stockport, and recently, The World of Glass museum).



My interest in local history was handed-down from my parents who were born and bred in Stoke-on-Trent where, as you know, we have such an interesting heritage and some wonderful architecture, while being not too far from beautiful countryside. Normacot was my place of birth, but I was brought up in Brown Edge. My short-lived "career", working for Midland Bank in London, was soon followed by motherhood and all the add- ons which that entailed, and for a good number of years I assisted in arranging the annual Newcastle Festival for Music, Speech & Drama. Nowadays my part-time clerical work is interspersed with helping to look after my grandchildren.

Our previous Programme Co-ordinator, Marion Lycett, and I had worked together before I formally took the post at the AGM in May 2025. I have had the privilege of being in the role for over a year now and I hope to carry on in the position for the 5-year stint until May 2030. Ideally someone amongst our membership will step forward at some point and take the reins, preferably overlapping to aid continuity, and I hope they find it as fulfilling as I am experiencing it to be. The NSNTA provides the opportunity to share our knowledge and participate in things closer to home & further afield and, as Programme Co-ordinator, I hope to encourage this amongst our membership by helping to put forward a varied programme that we can enjoy together. 'Something for everyone' is what I am aiming for to enrich our lives and enjoy the region we are lucky to live in, and with the help of a few "good eggs" to whom I am most grateful. think it is all coming together and we are getting there.

Unfortunately I am unable to attend all our gatherings, but do please say 'hello' when you come across me, or contact me via the details at the back of the Newsletter. I'd love to hear your suggestions or comments, or just have a general conversation, and you can let me know how you are finding the choice of events on offer - hopefully you are discovering the programme selection is attractive, with more coach trips and social lunches being put forward. My aim is to provide a range of 'little treats', as well as some 'special outings', so do let me know your views please.

Best wishes,  
*Helen Mansell*

## *Membership*

We have pleasure in announcing and welcoming the following who have joined since we last welcomed new members: Valerie Hiles, David and Valerie Kidd, Elizabeth Lovatt, Monica Darlington, Phillip and Helen Wheeler, Katie Taylor. Current membership is 223.

**NT Membership Discount** A reminder that a 25% discount on the general National Trust membership subscription is available to eligible members: those over 60 who have been members for over three years. Ring 0344 800 1895 to request it before your next subscription is due.

## *Photographic Archives*

The editor acknowledges and thanks contributors of photographs included in this issue, and also for any photos sent but not used. There is only room to include a selection here – these and more will be found on the website, see The Archive, List of past outings. (If they are not there yet keep watching for them to be added.)

## *Magazine back numbers*

A range of back numbers of the Newsletter is available to anyone who wants them. If you are missing an edition or want to complete your collection please let the Editor know.

## *Scarborough Visit, 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> May*

The National Trust group in Stafford runs along similar lines to our own North Staffs National Trust Association. They have a similar number of members and there is no need to be a member of the main National Trust. A committee spends a lot of time organising talks, events and an annual holiday. Like us, they sometimes have difficulty filling a full-size coach, so late last year, the holiday organiser contacted our committee inviting people to join them and fill the bus to Scarborough. Three of our members joined the trip, in a hotel on the top of the cliffs, overlooking the town.



On the journey in a Daish's coach, we stopped at the new Danum Gallery in Doncaster, complete with 2 train engines in the basement. The next day we visited Nunnington Hall, with a charming dolls house in the attic, then the huge Castle Howard. A whole day was spent at Sowerby Hall, near Bridlington. We visited the gallery of a wild-life artist, Robert Fuller, then in contrast, the Eden Camp, a museum of wartime history. On the return journey we saw Nostell Priory.

It was a pleasure to join the friendly Stafford group on this holiday, organised by Phil Grainger.

*Anthea Bond*

## *Reviews of Recent Events*

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March: Car Outing: Staffordshire Energy Recovery Facility.

A warm welcome awaited 19 members of our group at the Staffordshire Energy Recovery Facility, South Staffs. The bright and sunny March day was a great contrast to the austere Veolia waste recycling centre.



Built by French engineers, and set in an enormous business park, we were greeted with tea, coffee and biscuits before our group was split into two for a factory tour, which turned out to be very interesting belying

its grim exterior. Our tour host, Dan, proved to be a skilled raconteur explaining in great detail the intricate workings of the plant, built 13 years ago and working 24 hours a day, processing the waste, both domestic and commercial, for the whole of Staffordshire.



The logo – Recover, Recycle, Reduce, Re-use – sums up the reason for its distance and keeps its staff of 40 operatives busy round the clock.



From the moment 'the waste' enters the plant, every effort is made to achieve a complete and efficient result. Nothing in the process is allowed to escape its superbly efficient system ensuring it all works to maximum capacity and presents an operation which held us spellbound throughout the tour.

Any metals which could be reused were extracted and the furnace exuded little heat and moderate noise. Having dressed up like 'minions' in plastic helmets, gloves, high-viz jackets and protective glasses we presented a happy band of willing and attentive people absorbing the facts and figures that

were presented to us.

This proved to be a very jolly and well-organised trip, brilliantly put together by Helen and ending with a few of us retiring to the nearby Spread Eagle pub for a welcome lunch. Thanks to Helen for a most successful outing.

*Richard Clamp*

## Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April: Talk: Danny Wells: The English and Gardening.

If the English are not a nation of shopkeepers, then we are most definitely a nation of gardeners. The Irish, Scots and Welsh have some lovely gardens, but the English explored foreign lands for new plants to grow here. Our word “garden” has deep historical connections. It can be traced back to Old Norse and the Old English “garth” (yard), but it is the Old Norman French that gives us the word “gardin” (jardin). All allude to enclosed cultivated ground.

Eden was the first idealised representation of a garden. Monasteries needed to be self-sufficient, so they had their own functional areas in which to grow food and cultivate herbs for the treatment of ailments, no doubt consulting John Gerard’s “Herball”. It also served as a space for quiet contemplation, as did the Mediaeval rose garden.

The Roman villa at Fishbourne shows a very formal Italianate style of garden. When the Romans arrived, they brought their own plants to supplement the limited endemic flora. As exploration of foreign lands began, so did our plunder of plants from around the world, to grow in our wonderful temperate climate.

By 1621, the Oxford Botanic Garden had been founded and John Tradescant, father and son, introduced 750 new species. The Museum of Garden History in Lambeth, which contains their tomb, is well worth a visit.

James Cook, setting off to explore the Pacific, asked Joseph Banks to accompany him to record flora and fauna. He brought back 700 species. Banks was at Kew Gardens and a founding member of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1804 with Josiah Wedgwood’s son John.

The Wardian case, developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was a hermetically sealed, transportable, mini greenhouse, which allowed plant hunters to bring back specimens and keep them alive on the long sea journeys. Visit Biddulph Grange and see the garden created by James and Maria Bateman!

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the great English landscape makeover began, moving away from a formal, controlled space in the French style, which was very expensive to maintain, to something that allowed the English to demonstrate their freedom of thought. Lancelot “Capability” Brown and Humphrey Repton created a more natural landscape. Repton created 400 gardens and landscapes. Carl Linnaeus was a taxonomist. Polymath Erasmus Darwin in Lichfield was aware of the chemical and mineral needs of plants.

Few women are recorded as being involved in English gardens. Marianne North was an intrepid traveller, painting flora and fauna. Her paintings are now magnificently displayed in the Marianne North Gallery at Kew Gardens.

Vita Sackville-West created the garden at Sissinghurst with her husband Harold Nicholson. Gertrude Jekyll designed the gardens around Edwin Lutyen's houses. Her house, Munstead Wood, now belongs to the National Trust.

Kate Greenaway painted an old English vision of a garden and Cicely Mary Baker gave us the Flower Fairies. Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote "The Secret Garden" about the transformative power of gardens.

Mary Delaney, born in 1700, only began creating her exquisite and botanically accurate "paper mosaics" at the age of 72 and within 8 years had produced 985, all in the Linnaean classification. She built up her specimens by cutting tiny bits of paper into as many as 200 petals, layering small pieces over larger pieces for contour and depth, then sticking them to black backgrounds. She worked until her eyesight failed at the age of 88 and she died soon afterwards. Her work is kept at the British Museum. A special exhibition of her work, with demonstrations, is at Dunham Massey (National Trust) until 1 November 2026.

As technology moved on, lawn mowers appeared. There were more reliable boiler systems and William Paxton was able to take advantage of improvements in glass manufacture to create huge, magnificent glasshouses at Chatsworth, Princes Park in Toxteth, Liverpool and for the Great Exhibition of 1851.

World War I brought cataclysmic changes. Gardeners went off to fight, many did not return and large gardens fell into disrepair. Rudyard Kipling's poem "The Glory of the Garden" celebrates the people who made the gardens for our pleasure. A worthy tribute. World War II brought us allotments and the "Dig for Victory" slogan.

We have been visiting gardens for hundreds of years, now we can sample the 200 National Trust gardens. In addition, we have the wonderful National Gardens Scheme "Yellow Book", encouraging us through garden gates to enjoy lovely private gardens. In 2027, the NGS will celebrate 100 years of open gardens and fund-raising for charities.

Many thanks to Danny for a glimpse of our gardening history in the last 3 centuries and thanks to Anthea Bond for arranging it.

*Jane Cameron*

### **Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> April: Walk & Lunch: Bluebells at Hem Heath.**

This was another gloriously sunny day and we saw the English bluebells at their best. They are darker than the Spanish ones, the narrow flowers are on one side of the stems, which droop, and the leaves are smaller. Sometimes the paler Spanish bluebells appear, but they are removed by volunteers from the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.





The SWT manages the Woods. In February 2026, the SWT organised the main paths to have new, smooth gravel surfaces, so we were able to avoid muddy and uneven paths. The work was done with funding of more than £126,000 from the Veolia Environmental Trust. The smaller paths are cleared regularly by SWT volunteers.

Bluebells are a sign of ancient woodland, Hem Heath Woods have existed for at least 400 years. Some trees have been removed recently to reduce the danger of falling trees, to allow more light to reach the ground and more space for young broadleaf trees to grow. In the last 2 years, ash dieback disease has caused the death of many ash trees, so these are also being cut down. The trunks have been left on the ground to encourage wildlife. Surveys by the SWT showed that there are more bird species after cutting down the tallest trees.

In late spring 2026, SWT volunteers will collect bluebell seedheads and plant them in other areas of the woods, regenerating some parts and expanding other areas. It will take several years for the new bluebells to establish.

After the walk, we appreciated the lunch at the Trentham Toby Carvery.

*Anthea Bond*



## Friday 8<sup>th</sup> May: Coach Trip: RHS Malvern Spring Festival

This Spring Festival was held at the Three Counties Showground at the foot of the beautiful Malvern Hills. We were glad to be on a coach trip when we passed hundreds of cars already filling the car parks.

There were many stalls selling everything connected with gardening - many duplications! I found the many floral displays in the marquees amazing particularly those featuring irises, lilies and peonies, all available in colours not normally found in garden centres. Local growers such as Proctors of Brown Edge and Marts from Smallwood seemed to be selling well.

Thank you to Rose and Sue for organising this event: everyone had a lovely time.

*Shirley Timmis*



Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> May: AGM & Talk: Paul Walton, head gardener at Biddulph Grange.

**Draft Minutes of the 46<sup>th</sup> A.G.M at the North Staffs Conference Centre**

1. 81 members attended the A.G.M and there were 7 apologies.

2. Chairman's Report: Bob Winter welcomed everyone to the meeting, with a special welcome to those new members who had joined since last year. He looked back on a successful year for the Association, with a wide range of coach trips, car outings, walks and talks. Notably the series of social lunches is being well supported, and the holiday to the Isle of Man was a great success.

Bob thanked all the committee members for their hard work, including Helen Mansell for organising our programme of events, Anthea Bond likewise for the talks, and John Spriggs for his work on the newsletter and website.

3. The Minutes of the 45<sup>th</sup> A.G.M were accepted as a true record of the Meeting (proposed by Madeleine Hopley, seconded by Jane Mayer).

4. Secretary's Report: Richard Adams returned the compliment to Bob, thanking him on behalf of all the committee for his leadership and hard work for us all. Our membership is now 217, three fewer members than last year but nevertheless an encouraging figure given the falls in previous years.

5. Treasurer's Report: Huw Davies presented the accounts for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, showing a good surplus of £2,378 and current reserves standing at £12,324. We made one donation of £1,500, to Biddulph Grange Gardens.

Huw thanked James Scott of Hardings, Chartered Accountants, for independently examining the accounts.

There were no questions, and a motion to approve the accounts (proposed by Roger Cartlidge, seconded by Madeleine Hopley) was passed unanimously.

6. Subscriptions: The Meeting agreed to keep the level of subscriptions unchanged.

7. Approvals for Re-election: The Meeting agreed to waive the requirement to stand down after 5 years as per our Constitution.

8. Elections of Officers and Committee: All of the committee and officers were willing to continue in their current roles, and this was approved by a show of hands. The unchanged committee for 2026-27 is – Bob Winter (chairman), Sue Till, John Spriggs, John Pedrazzini, Jane Mayer, Helen Mansell, Marion Lycett, Cynthia Dumbelton, Huw Davies (treasurer), Anthea Bond, Philip Alcock, Richard Adams (secretary).

9 AOB: Richard Mayer thanked the committee for everything they do for us.

The Meeting closed at 7.15 pm.

**North Staffs National Trust Association**

**Income and Expenditure Account for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**

|                                                       | 2025/2026   |              | 2024/2025   |              |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
|                                                       | £           | £            | £           | £            |
| <b><u>Income</u></b>                                  |             |              |             |              |
| Members' Subscriptions                                | 2216        |              | 2390        |              |
| Donations                                             | 112         |              | 135         |              |
| Surplus on Trips and Events                           | 4029        |              | 587         |              |
| Bank Interest                                         | <u>142</u>  |              | <u>213</u>  |              |
|                                                       |             | 6499         |             | 3325         |
| <b><u>Expenditure</u></b>                             |             |              |             |              |
| Talks (incl Venue Hire )                              | 1890        |              | 1638        |              |
| Newsletter Costs                                      | 645         |              | 562         |              |
| Postage and Officers' Expenses                        | 86          |              | 48          |              |
| Donations Biddulph Grange                             | <u>1500</u> |              | <u>7000</u> |              |
|                                                       |             | 4121         |             | 9248         |
| <b>Net Surplus/Deficit for the year</b>               |             | <u>2378</u>  |             | <u>-5923</u> |
| <b>Balance Sheet as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026</b> |             |              |             |              |
| <b><u>Assets</u></b>                                  |             |              |             |              |
| Bank Balance                                          |             | 11438        |             | 15616        |
| Payments in Advance                                   |             | <u>1850</u>  |             | <u>150</u>   |
|                                                       |             | 13288        |             | 15766        |
| <b><u>Liabilities</u></b>                             |             |              |             |              |
| Receipts in Advance                                   |             | 964          |             | 5820         |
| <b>Total Net Assets</b>                               |             | <u>12324</u> |             | <u>9946</u>  |
| <b>Represented by :</b>                               |             |              |             |              |
| <b><u>Reserves</u></b>                                |             |              |             |              |
| Reserves brought forward                              |             | 9946         |             | 15869        |
| Surplus/Deficit for the year                          |             | 2378         |             | <u>-5923</u> |
| <b>Total Reserves</b>                                 |             | <u>12324</u> |             | <u>9946</u>  |

R Winter--- Chairman

H Davies---Treasurer

I have examined the accounts set out above and in my opinion they are in accordance with the records produced to me and properly reflect the financial affairs and position of the Association.

J Scott (Hon. Examiner) Hardings Chartered Accountants, Marsh Parade, Newcastle-u-Lyme

## **Paul Walton: Biddulph Grange Garden, an ongoing restoration.**

Paul started by telling us his own history. He left school in 1992 and soon started as a trainee gardener, progressing to assistant gardener, then senior gardener, garden manager and now he is the head gardener.

James Bateman lived nearby until 1841 when he bought Biddulph Grange. In 1868, James ran out of money so passed the house onto his son. Robert Heath was the next owner, planting more evergreens and renovating the house. In 1895 there was a fire. In the 1920s it became a hospital and the NHS ran it from 1948, with several wards being built for orthopaedics. In 1991, the National Trust took over the property and garden, which became their largest restoration project.

Paul described the importance of the hedges dividing the garden, the dahlia walk, the Chinese temple and garden and the Cheshire cottage (1856). The Egyptian Garden, with pyramids of yew, has the Egyptian god of botany inside.

The Italian Garden has rhododendrons, the kitchen garden has produce for the tea room. The stumpery was re-created after a large donation, it is probably the largest and oldest in the UK.

Wellingtonia avenue originally had cedars between the Wellingtonia trees, with chestnut trees behind and black pines. 130 of these trees were felled and in 1992 seeds were sown for the trees which are now 41 m high.

A recent project, funded by our own NSNTA, has created steps with handrails for easier access to all parts of this amazing garden.

Paul has 3 full-time gardeners, 2 part-timers, and many volunteers, including a group with learning difficulties. They form a good team with varied skills.

*Anthea Bond*

## **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June: Coach Trip: Wentworth Woodhouse, South Yorkshire.**

An almost full coach left Newcastle promptly at 8.30am with everyone looking forward to the new venture in Rotherham, a house reputed to be the largest stately home in England. By the time the coach was parked, we were suitably impressed by its size.

Set in over 1,500 acres of parkland, the sheer width of the house impresses, followed by the many rooms unfortunately connected by many banks of steep stairs!

On arrival we climbed up to the Long Gallery for welcome coffee and biscuits, followed by an excellent tour of the available rooms. Its





history, brought to life by our knowledgeable hostess, was varied to say the least, taking us from its birth in 1725 by the Marquis of Rockingham, through both World Wars and of course struggling to survive various Trusts, including the National Trust, enabling us to visit and appreciate it today.

Lunch was excellent. A cold buffet prepared by an excellent kitchen and the incredibly knowledgeable staff, aided by enthusiastic volunteers, made the whole experience of the visit thoroughly enjoyable.

Many thanks to Bob Winter for choosing a most interesting venue, one not many of us had visited before. Also thanks to our excellent coach driver, Mark. Oh, and remembering to thank and appreciate all the members who spend the time to find these superb places for us all to enjoy.

*Richard Clamp*



## Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June: Social Lunch at the Hand and Trumpet, Betley.

It was a warm day in North Staffordshire as 25 members convened for another social lunch at the Hand and Trumpet for enjoyable food and conversation.



Thanks to Nicky Adams for arranging this. She also appeals for suggestions for further venues for such lunches, which can accommodate parties of this size without pre-ordering or demanding deposits!

## Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> July: Car Outing: Guided tour of Biddulph Grange Garden.

On a glorious July morning 28 of us gathered in the Drawing room where tea, coffee and biscuits were served before we ventured into the garden.

Paul Walton in his talk to us at the AGM had given us an interesting account of the restoration and his personal journey through it.

We were split into two groups led by Paul Walton and Helen Wilshaw (Visitor Experience Manager)



The two teams started in opposite directions on a circular route in the main area of the garden finally meeting back in the Drawing room which was available to us for the rest of the day.



Helen's group began in Italy, planted with summer bedding and a dazzling display of fuchsia-filled Victorian urns. At the focal point of the golden yew, turning to the right, we were able to view Lime Avenue, originally a path from the house to St. Lawrence Church. To the left we entered the Araucaria Parterre and Lakeside.

By way of steps we arrived in

Mrs Batemans, a series of small gardens each with a different theme. A flight of recently installed steps, with funding from the NSNTA, leads us up to the Verbena Parterre and along the Cherry Orchard.



From here we made our way to the Geological Gallery, exhibiting maps, fossils and rock works linking the geological eras to the Biblical story of the six days of the Creation.

The seventh day being the garden itself. This was Bateman's way of coming to terms with his religious beliefs and the scientific discoveries of the time.





Onwards to Egypt, a grass court with yew hedges with a path flanked by a pair of sphinxes and topiary obelisks. The path leads to a stone doorway bearing the image of the sun god Ra with the top of the pyramid also in yew. Beyond the doorway a gloomy passageway leading to a chamber lit by a red light where sits Thoth, God of Botany.

After a short diversion under Cheshire cottage, the Pinetum came into view, a winding pathway flanked by a fine collection of trees.



Retracing our steps back to the Eastern Terrace, we made our way through the Stumpery and on into China the Jewel in the Crown of the garden, with its many colourful features, all relating to Chinese culture. Its many important trees and shrubs giving a spectacular display of Autumn colour.

Finally, we made our way from China to our starting point via the Dahlia Walk, which should be ablaze with colour in late Summer.



Many thanks to Helen Mansell for arranging this visit.

*Sue Pitt.*

| <b>NSNTA Committee 2026-2027</b>                                                     |                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bob Winter</b><br>Chair<br>robert.winter14@btinternet.com                         | 15 Robinson Road<br>Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8ED<br>01782 642942, 07783321209             |
| <b>Vacant</b><br>Vice-chair                                                          |                                                                                     |
| <b>Richard Adams</b><br>Secretary and Membership Secretary<br>rjadams@doctors.org.uk | 79 Whitmore Road<br>Newcastle ST5 3LZ<br>07599 912938                               |
| <b>Anthea Bond</b><br>Talks Organiser<br>antheabond@hotmail.com                      |                                                                                     |
| <b>Huw Davies</b><br>Treasurer<br>huws.family@gmail.com                              | 2 Vicarage Crescent<br>Newcastle ST5 1NJ<br>07825 475382                            |
| <b>Helen Mansell</b><br>Programme Coordinator<br>helenmansell@gmail.com              | 01782 626091, 07866 352927                                                          |
| <b>John Spriggs</b><br>Newsletter and Website<br>NSNTA.newsletter@outlook.com        | Rose Villa, Bowers Bent<br>Standon, Stafford ST21 6SG<br>01782 791360               |
| <b>Phil Alcock</b><br>phil.alcock@yahoo.co.uk                                        | Millstone House, The Green, Bagnall,<br>Stoke-on-Trent ST9 9JR<br>07814 028828      |
| <b>Cynthia Dumbelton</b><br>dumbeltoncynthia@gmail.com                               | 32 The Lea<br>Stoke-on-Trent ST4 8DY<br>01782 641765, 07815 924645                  |
| <b>Marion Lycett</b><br>marionlycett@gmail.com                                       | Millstone House, The Green, Bagnall<br>Stoke-on-Trent ST9 9JR<br>01782 502919       |
| <b>Jane Mayer</b><br>janemayeruk@yahoo.co.uk                                         | 16 Shaldon Avenue, Stockton Brook<br>Stoke-on-Trent ST9 9PU<br>01782 533476         |
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| <b>Sue Till</b><br>st.till@icloud.com                                                | 6 Kingsfield Oval, Basford,<br>Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffs ST4 6HW<br>01782 405415 |
| <b>Other Posts</b>                                                                   |                                                                                     |
| <b>Kay Williams</b><br>williakay@gmail.com                                           | 3 The Spinney, Madeley Heath, Crewe, CW3 9TB.<br>01782 751018                       |

| <b>Programme Summary Autumn 2026</b>        |                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>September</b>                            |                                                                                                 |
| Mon 7 <sup>th</sup> -Thu 10 <sup>th</sup>   | Holiday: Royal Residences & Gardens of London.                                                  |
| Fri 11 <sup>th</sup> - Sun 20 <sup>th</sup> | Heritage Open Days                                                                              |
| Tue 15 <sup>th</sup>                        | Talk: Andrew van Buren: Philip Astley and me.                                                   |
| <b>October</b>                              |                                                                                                 |
| Thu 1 <sup>st</sup>                         | Car outing: Crewe Railway Heritage Museum                                                       |
| Tue 13 <sup>th</sup>                        | Planning meeting at Jane and Richard Mayer's                                                    |
| Thu 15 <sup>th</sup>                        | Social Lunch at the Holly Bush "Ego", Stockton Brook                                            |
| Tue 20 <sup>th</sup>                        | Talk: Ken and Rose Pemberton: Sandon church past and present.                                   |
| <b>November</b>                             |                                                                                                 |
| Wed 4 <sup>th</sup>                         | Car outing: Saulton Hall, near Wem, Salop.                                                      |
| Tue 17 <sup>th</sup>                        | Talk: Henry Birks, Shadows and Structures: Rediscovering Maurice Wade's Vision of the Potteries |
| <b>December</b>                             |                                                                                                 |
| Wed 16 <sup>th</sup>                        | Christmas Lunch at Aston-by-Stone.                                                              |
| <b>January</b>                              |                                                                                                 |
| Tue 19 <sup>th</sup>                        | Talk: Malcolm Gray from the Canal and River Trust.                                              |
| <b>February</b>                             |                                                                                                 |
| Tue 16 <sup>th</sup>                        | Talk: Jeff Sim, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust: Craddocks Moss Beaver Project.                    |
| <b>March</b>                                |                                                                                                 |
| Tue 16 <sup>th</sup>                        | Talk: Peter Thomas: Hedges.                                                                     |

*This Newsletter (and previous editions) is available on the website.*