

WYRE FOREST & DISTRICT CENTRE



in support of **National
Trust**

Centre Newsletter

*A voluntary association of National Trust members and volunteers
founded in 1984 to promote and prosper the work of the National Trust*

www.wyreforestntcentre.co.uk

From the Chairman

SO FAR SO GOOD. Our Centre's programme of activities during the year has been successful, and it is heartening to see an increasing number of members attending our indoor meetings. It is hoped that this trend will continue, and that the present level of support will be sustained. A number of support groups have sadly closed down during the pandemic, and our Centre is one of just 220 such groups still active. We shall celebrate our fortieth birthday in 2024.

The NT could not function without its volunteers. However, the number has decreased, and some properties are advertising to encourage people to come forward. A shortage of volunteers has been cited as one reason for the closure of shops at many properties, including Hanbury Hall and Dudmaston. Members are invited to consider helping out.

A landmark partnership between the NT and the Canal & River Trust resulted in the Birmingham Roundhouse reopening to the public. The building is occupied by a range of organisations supporting its future, part of the NT's plans for urban places. A further example was the Trust's involvement in the "Birmingham in Bloom" project during the 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Wightwick Manor, in the care of the NT since 1937, is to open a new greenhouse, to provide horticultural classes for visitors. Wightwick still has a shop, another reason for visiting the property!

The NT's Annual Report gives visiting figures for 2021/22. The "league table" shows that Attingham Park tops the list with nearly 563,000 visitors. Croome is further down the list at 235,000. The figures seem to indicate how much we all value places where there are extensive grounds, to get out in the fresh air and stretch our legs.

It may be a trifle early, but I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Chris Fonteyn

PERSONAL ACCIDENT INSURANCE

Members aged 80 and over who attend any National Trust Wyre Forest Centre event are reminded that they may not be covered by any personal accident insurance unless they have their own personal cover.



Broughton Castle, visited on 16 June (see p.3)



Francis Engleheart

The historic tree house at Pitchford Hall, visited on 20 April (see p.3)

Welcome to our new members

Mrs J Armstrong
Mr and Mrs K Bartlett
Mr and Mrs V Cartwright
Mrs S Chance
Mr & Mrs M Christian-Brookes
Mr & Mrs D Coop and Miles
Mrs P Davies
Mr and Mrs R Dymott
Mrs J Guest
Mr & Mrs G Little
Ms B Lloyd
Ms J McMillan
Ms J Mallinson
Mrs V Stephenson
Mrs M Tindall
Mr and Mrs S Ward
Miss A Wright

Long service awards for 2022:

Francis Engleheart – 30 years
Eric Carson – 25 years

Indoor meetings

AT THE CENTRE'S **March** meeting Claire Hale and Peter Hodges gave a presentation on *Kinver Edge and the Rock Houses*. Claire is the NT's Property Manager and Peter is a volunteer there. The property was given to the NT in 1917. It is a rare area of lowland heath, and is a SSSI. The Rock Houses were at risk of being destroyed, but Kinver's villagers rallied round and a management committee was set up. The remains of an Iron Age hillfort can be found on Kinver Edge. Conservation work continues, and there is grazing by cattle to control the scrub. The Centre has made various donations to the property, including £500 in 1999 to restore the brickwork on a lean-to. Claire stressed the significance of the heath area. Endangered species found there include adder, slow-worm, wood warbler, crossbill, tree pipit and woodcock. Conifers, which do not support wildlife, are being removed. A Centenary Path was created, the garden at the Rock Houses is coming back to life, and work on the ramparts of the hillfort continues. The property has some 250 volunteers, with young people actively involved. A "Welcome Hut" has been put in place. The Rock Houses are home to 33 lesser horseshoe bats, the only colony in Staffordshire. Our new season began in **September** with Becky White, the NT's North Worcestershire General Manager, presenting *Hanbury Hall – an Update*. Becky's portfolio also includes Hawford and Wichenford dovecotes, Knowles Mill, Rosedene and Greyfriars. She is responsible for 40 NT staff members and about 300 volunteers. Neil Cook, the head gardener at Hanbury, has worked for the NT for 40 years. Michelle Hill, House Steward, has been there for 20 years. Becky has worked for the NT for 19 years. She has worked in Northern Ireland, Wales and the North West Region. The Ash Pans project at Hanbury, now completed, was funded from the legacy of Joan White, a former member of our Centre. The Vernon family had an interest in sanitation, and the ash pans were the state of the art in Victorian technology. The Rev. Henry Moule patented the earth closet in the mid nineteenth century. Soil or ash from fireplaces was used, but constant emptying was required. Such closets were in use until the 1960s. During the restoration care was taken with regard to the great crested newts in the nearby pond. Hanbury is to have enhanced tearoom facilities and a new kitchen, built on the footprint of a demolished building. The project should be completed by January 2023. In **October** John Chapman spoke on *Sir Winston Churchill*. Churchill (1874–1965) was a strong character who enjoyed gambling (not very successfully). He married Clementine in 1908 and had five children. He had a speech impediment (a lateral lisp) and had special dentures to aid his speech. He was educated at Harrow, and developed a love of cigars and polo. Churchill was a war correspondent in Cuba, Sudan and South



Chris Fonteyn



Chris Fonteyn



Francis Engleheart

Pictures from our programme of trips this summer. Top left: Abercamlais, visited on 17 May; top right: Bodrhyddan Hall, visited during the North Wales holiday; below: Pitchford Hall, visited on 20 April

Africa, where he escaped from a POW camp in Pretoria. His military service included the Western Front in 1915, and he was involved with the development of the tank. He rose to Lieutenant-Colonel of the 6th Battalion, Royal Scots Fusiliers. Churchill's political career included a period as First Lord of the Admiralty, and in 1924–29, Chancellor. His first term as Prime Minister began on 10 May 1940, leading the country through World War II. He became Leader of the Opposition in 1945, and served a second term as prime minister 1951–55. Churchill suffered from depression, had a series of strokes, and suffered two heart attacks. He left parliament in 1964. He spent time in Madeira and the French Riviera. Churchill had purchased Chartwell in 1922 where he enjoyed painting, breeding butterflies, and being a competent bricklayer! He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953. Churchill College, Cambridge, was founded in 1958 in his honour, and a US warship named after him in 1995. His state funeral took place at St Paul's Cathedral on 30 January 1965. He is buried in the graveyard at St Martin's, Bladon in Oxfordshire. In **November** we heard about *Madresfield – Fame & Scandal* from John Chester, whose presentation focused on the Lygon family of Madresfield Court, near Malvern. Madresfield Court dates from the twelfth century. The family built up a fortune, largely due to the efforts of a family member known as William the Miser. It is said that Dickens, who brought his daughter to Malvern to take the waters, based the Jarndyce v. Jarndyce court case in *Bleak House* on a matter connected to the Lygons. The family became ennobled – the earls Beauchamp – but the title is extinct. John's talk focused on the 7th Earl Beauchamp, who inherited aged 19. He

was mayor of Worcester at the age of 23, and married in 1902. He served as Governor of New South Wales for eighteen months. He gained a reputation for hosting lavish parties. The earl was then aged 26. He was closely involved with the arrangements for the coronation of George V. He became a Knight of the Garter in 1914, and Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1915. He developed a strong interest in religion and politics, denouncing Churchill. He had seven children. In 1930 he became Chancellor of London University. There was concern about his lifestyle, and there was gossip about his indiscretions involving young men. His brother-in-law, the duke of Westminster, described as the richest man in Europe, was not impressed. Jealous of the earl's status in the establishment, he vowed revenge because of the treatment of his sister. The countess subsequently filed for divorce and left the earl. King George V found out about the earl's activities and was horrified. The earl was forced to resign as Leader of the House of Lords. He faced the risk of trial or exile. On 7 June 1931, three peers went to Madresfield to confront the earl. The king ordered him to leave the country and he went into exile in Germany. He had considered suicide. In 1936 he was given permission to return for his son Hugh's funeral. The earl's arrest warrant was revoked in 1937, but he remained in disgrace. Terminally ill with cancer, he died soon after. Evelyn Waugh became a family friend, and four of his novels have connections with Madresfield, including *Brideshead Revisited*. Madresfield remains in the hands of the Lygon family, descending through the female line.

Reports by Chris Fonteyn. The full reports can be read on the Centre's website

Summer outings

IN 1992 OUR CENTRE was scheduled to visit **Pitchford Hall**. But then came the sale by the Colthurst family and your Editor's first outing was rearranged to nearby Plaish. Thirty years later we made it, opening our season on 20 April. The Colthursts are back and reviving Shropshire's finest timber-framed country house. Our welcome, from three guides, could not have been friendlier. As well as seeing the historic interiors, we could roam a previously neglected range on the north side, its warren of rooms and staircases full of potential. We walked to the pitch well in the grounds that gives the village its name, and after seeing the historic tree house finished with tea in the restored orangery. To get an idea of the family's aspirations, see a short video from Historic Houses, found on YouTube. And on our own website read Eric Greenwood's article. On 17 May we visited **Abercamlais**. A coffee stop was arranged in Leominster and lunch was at the Peterstone Court Hotel near Brecon. At Abercamlais House we were met by owners Andrea and Anthony Ballance and their daughter. They explained the history of the house that had belonged to the Williams family since about 1560, and how the late Mrs Ballance had been left it by her father. The group then divided to see house and garden. The garden is a work in progress, especially the walled garden which is under restoration. There were also a few trees down as a result of winter storms. The house has had many additions, the last from Victorian times. You enter by the hall which has dark panelling and portraits of the Williams family, many of whom were clergymen. Souvenirs were on sale, and work by a local artist who was there to talk to us. After tea and cake the heavens opened as we said our goodbyes. The 16th of June was a glorious day and we arrived at **Broughton Castle** in time for coffee. As this was a private visit we were given a guided tour. Broughton is a fortified medieval manor house, home of the Fiennes family, Barons Saye and Sele. It sits on an artificial island surrounded by a moat. It



Frogmore House, visited on 25 August

was built of the local limestone in 1300 by Sir John de Broughton and crenellated in 1406. Transformed into a Tudor manor house, in the seventeenth century it became a centre of Parliamentary sympathisers and was besieged by Prince Rupert in the Civil War. Lord Saye and Sele was pardoned by Charles II after the Restoration because he had not signed the death warrant of Charles I! Rooms open included the King's Chamber, the Great Parlour, the Chapel, the Oak Room, the Library and several bedrooms. The carved fireplaces were impressive, along with ornate plastered ceilings. After enjoying a delicious ploughman's lunch we visited the church of St Mary and the gardens with roses in full bloom. Broughton has been used for filming many times, most recently for *Shakespeare in Love* and *Wolf Hall*. The Fiennes family is well known – Sir Ranulph is an explorer and Ralph and Joseph are actors while Susannah is a portrait painter who has painted the King. On 2 August our visit to **Biddulph Grange** began in rain, but the weather improved and we were able to view the various aspects of the garden. After a meal break, we proceeded to **Adlington Hall** which has been owned by the Legh

family for 700 years and is a fine example of architecture over the whole of that time. We were met by a member of the family and given guided tours. Following time exploring the garden we indulged in an excellent cream tea. **Frogmore House**, which we visited on 25 August, is located within Windsor Home Park, about a mile from Windsor Castle. Dating from about 1680, Frogmore was purchased by Queen Charlotte in 1792. The queen and her daughters' passion for art and botany are reflected throughout the interior. Queen Victoria's mother, the duchess of Kent, lived there for 20 years. The duchess of Kent, and Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, are buried in two mausoleums in the grounds. Frogmore is elegant, a brilliant white building by a shimmering lake, a place of charm and serenity – despite the ever-present sound of aircraft using Heathrow! We then made the short trip to the **Savill Garden**. In 1932 Queen Mary gave Sir Eric Savill permission to develop a 35-acre garden. It is one of the finest woodland gardens – and the biggest – in the country. On 20 September we were at last able to visit **Arbury Hall** near Nuneaton – the earlier date had been cancelled due to the forecasted extreme heat. Arbury, built on the remains of a Priory founded by Henry II, came into the hands of the Newdegate family after they swapped houses with a lawyer promoted to London who found the commute too much. In 1742, after doing the Grand Tour, Sir Roger Newdegate (different spelling, different branch), decided that it should be updated in the Gothic Revival style. The exterior is little changed; inside are remnants of the Tudor mansion but the principal rooms are filled with wonderful, often vaulted, ceilings. Arbury is still the principal family home of the Newdegates (back to original spelling!) and they made us very welcome with tea and cakes.



Different architectural styles are visible at Adlington Hall, visited on 2 August

With thanks to **Vic Powell, Janet Cholmondeley, Denise Carson, Chris Fonteyn** and **Katey Fletcher**.

Reports can be read in full on the Centre's website

Summer Holiday

WE HAVE AT LAST been able to make the visit to Anglesey and North Wales, using Johnson's Coaches. On our way to the historic Bulkeley Hotel in Beaumaris – built for thirteen-year-old Victoria as Mr Bulkeley cannily realised it would make it fashionable – we stopped at Plas Newydd in Llangollen. Here Lady Eleanor Butler, under pressure to enter a convent, and Miss Sarah Ponsonby, likewise to make an unwelcome marriage, escaped Catholic Ireland for somewhere they could live together. Welcomed in the town, they extended the cottage, adding gothic and Tudor elements such as stained glass and wood panelling, and it became a fashionable destination for such as Wordsworth, Wellington and Josiah Wedgwood. We could travel only three quarters of the Snowdon Mountain Railway due to track work on the top stretch but rode up to Clogwyn Station. The summit being wreathed in low cloud, we probably didn't miss much! The National Slate Museum nearby is in the former workshop of the Dinorwic slate quarry with its many layers of galleries cut into the mountainside and underground. In the late nineteenth century it employed 3,000 men, supplying roofing tiles around the world but by 1969 it was no longer profitable and the site and contents were put up for auction. An intervention by the Chief Engineer saved the workshop and contents and these constitute the fifty-year-old museum. It was a fascinating place and even those of us less technically minded enjoyed the displays used to illustrate the various stages from extracting the raw slate to finished tiles ready for sale. Moving the slate (and waste) around the quarry required many different gauge railways, trams, horses and lifts up, down and across the galleries and site, some of which were on display. At Caernarfon Castle we battled with the wind and rain. Even though undergoing works in preparation for a £4m overhaul it exudes a sense of power and illustrates the competence of Edward I's master builder, Master James of St George. Lovely Plas Newydd on Anglesey provided a great contrast. There we saw the long mural by Rex Whistler and were lucky enough to have some of its secrets revealed by a room steward, highlighting seeming changes when viewed from other angles,



Plas Newydd, Llangollen, visited during the North Wales Holiday

such as mountains fading into the distance, a golden crown losing its lustre and boats changing direction. Bodrhyddan Hall south of Prestatyn was a delightful place. Originally built to escape the noise and discomfort of nearby Rhuddlan Castle it has been extended, re-orientated and 'improved'. All the rooms we saw were large and flooded with light except for a small dark room containing a couple of sarcophagi, one of which has its original occupant and apparently emits noises occasionally! There were many military men in the family, hence a vast collection of weaponry, including crossbows. The gardens contain old oak, sequoias, topiary and interesting buildings. A free afternoon was spent in the sunny seaside town of Llandudno with a chance to go up the Great Orme, have an ice cream or enjoy that lovely hobby of people-watching. Bodnant Gardens are always lovely regardless of season. For us it was the brilliant acers. As usual we had a lovely supper on the way home, this time at Albright Hussey Manor, Shrewsbury. Our thanks to Chris and Denise with support from Sheelah and Eric. We are so lucky to have such people in Wyre Forest Centre but if the Centre is to continue we all need to pitch in, perhaps organising a day trip or in some other way. Have a chat with our Chairman, Chris or one of the committee members.

Katey Fletcher

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Blakedown Parish Rooms
Tuesday 14 February 2023
7.30 p.m.

Nominations for officers or other elections to the Committee must be made by any Centre member in writing and be in the hands of the Secretaries at least 14 days before the AGM. Copies of the minutes of the 2022 AGM are available on request from the Secretaries. An agenda will be circulated at the meeting.

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Mr Alan Wood

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Chris Fonteyn

North Wales holiday: left, Peter Archer inspects locomotive George at Clogwyn Station; below, the canal terrace at Bodnant



Chris Fonteyn