

July 2009

Issue 24

Many thanks to all contributors, especially those who both organise and 'write-up' the various walks and visits. Seasonal lunches continue to attract high numbers and provide an excellent forum for the exchange of news and views about Warwick past and present. See you in September!

LT(Ed)

Bursary News

The Committee was delighted to hear from Lewis Bush, one of the recipients of the WRSA 2009 Bursary Awards, that his photographic project *The Arts at Warwick* is progressing well and that the work will be on display in the Arts Centre Foyer from **Tuesday 23 to Thursday 25 June**. The project so far can be seen at: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lewisbush/sets/72157612163686113/>

Spring Lunch, Tuesday 31 March, Sports Pavilion

Ninety-eight members enjoyed a healthy and appetising buffet lunch followed by a talk by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Stuart Palmer. His theme was the unfolding of *Vision 2015*, a Strategy born out of a year long consultation process across the University, instigated by Professor Nigel Thrift on his appointment as Vice-Chancellor in 2006. Professor Palmer spoke with humour and enthusiasm about various aspects of the Strategy and its intellectual and material goals. Among the 'headings' covered were: postgraduate numbers (the aim is to double the current research student population); the University's high rating in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (Warwick ranked 7th overall in the UK, and top university in the Midlands); last autumn's Quality Assurance Agency Audit (assessment of university teaching) resulting in 6 departmental commendations; the graduation of the first 200 Warwick Medical School students. Also mentioned was the pursuit of strong links with overseas universities, including Boston (USA) and universities in Australia, Singapore and India. On the material side, Professor Palmer listed planned new buildings and others undergoing radical refurbishment or extension. The list includes the Clinical Trails Unit, Physical Science, Warwick Business School expansion, an Indoor Tennis Centre, the Butterworth Hall and the Student Union. Additional student accommodation is also planned (the Bluebell Residences). The Strategy emphasizes the University's commitment to energy efficiency and to 'green' policies at every level (the new Digital Laboratory has a 'green' roof!). In his wide-ranging and well-illustrated talk Professor Palmer made reference to the challenge of the prevailing economic climate and the importance of income-generating enterprises on campus.

After responding to a number of questions from the floor, Professor Palmer drew out the first ticket in the membership 'lottery' for a place on the forthcoming visit to Highgrove House.

LT(Ed)

A FOGGY DAY: walk around Wootton Wawen - January 2008

A surprisingly large number of us (nineteen in all) gathered at the Golden Cross public house on the Stratford to Birmingham road at 10am in freezing foggy conditions, though it was apparent that the sun was trying to break through. We started and ended the walk at the Bearley aqueduct - a fine piece of Victorian engineering and the second longest one of its kind in the country. It was built in 1815 and crosses the valley of the Edstone brook, a railway line, and a road. Because of the frost, the going was mercifully quite good despite earlier rain, and we walked through the hamlet of Newnham, held up only by the ungraciously high and slippery stiles en route. We skirted Little Alne and climbed to a hill overlooking Wootton Wawen, where our leader soon gave up trying to evoke the beautiful view that might have been there but for the mist! However the persistent hoar frost did give an interesting and rather ghostly atmosphere to the walk. Eventually we walked alongside the river Alne into Wootton Wawen, and were delighted to see a heron alight not far from us. Evidence of his/her activities was soon seen on the river bank, where there were lots of shells of large freshwater mussels. Finally we threaded our way through the surprisingly large number of horses in the surrounding fields and made our way back along the canal, reaching the aqueduct at 1 p.m.. At this point the sun finally broke through, and we were rewarded with some lovely views of the attractive countryside on either side of the canal. Malcolm's new GPS revealed the walk was exactly 5 miles long and that we had lost 33 minutes coping with those pesky stiles.



Lunch at the Golden Cross was very welcome and much enjoyed.

Godfrey and Caroline Carr

FLOODS AND ALL THAT: walk from Eathorpe – February 2009

Snow fell a few days before, and melted on the day before with the onset of heavy rain. The resultant flood raised the river Leam five foot above normal, and, after a 'course inspection' the previous evening, the walk route was very much modified. Black ice on a bright morning caused eight cancellations, and fourteen of us gathered on the icy car park of the Plough Inn. Using the road, and crossing the Leam on the way, the river being only half way across the road, we reached Wappenbury, where we viewed the grave of Sir William Lyons, the founder of Jaguar Cars. Returning the same way, we were delighted to find that the river had not risen, and we took the bridleway to Marton village with its views over the village and the Leam valley, where we puzzled over a mural on the outside of the unusually named St Esprit church. Following a visit to view the snowdrops lining the drive of Eathorpe Hall, we enjoyed an excellent lunch at the Plough Inn.



Malcolm Wilding

HAMPTON LUCY HASSLE! – March 2009

“Which group are you with, then?” or “Where can I park?” These seemed to be the greetings among a confusion of walkers and a congestion of cars! (If those are the correct collective nouns). No fewer than three walking groups had arranged to meet on 11th March in Hampton Lucy. The two U3A groups set off in different directions and we walked towards the river bridge. Staying to the west of the River Avon we climbed onto the footpath that gave fine views of Charlecote Mill and the necessary weirs. The path proceeds northwards along the crest of the river cliff so that we could see the meanders to our right but the Welcombe Monument and Alveston Church to our left. Leaving the river we turned west, went around a spinney, crossed a lane and a stile to walk between the sheep of Daisy Hill Farm. After looping left and to the south a short walk along the Snitterfield Street was needed before we cut across by Mount Pleasant Farm. This left a section of lane to return to the village. Most of the 18 members then enjoyed a meal at the Boar’s Head.

Dick Hosking.

A NICE APRIL DAY – walk from Barston 2009

The April walk was in the valley of the River Blythe between the conservation village of Barston and Knowle, almost the last bit of countryside before reaching Solihull and Birmingham airport. The Blythe is a lowland river meandering its way across the Warwickshire clays until it eventually joins the River Trent. It is one of the cleanest rivers in England and reputed to contain dace, chub, perch and the occasional trout: not that we saw any of these. The water meadows along the valley are frequently flooded but after a long dry spell we encountered very few patches of mud.



Twenty seven walkers set out from the Bulls Head in Barston on a beautiful sunny day in late April. Crossing the road we entered St. Swithin's churchyard with its medieval cross. This year's bluebell crop was just coming into bloom. Then down the hill towards the first bridge over the river, passing a line of dried up springs and crossing Hob Lane on the way. Next, through the water meadows and up the hill through farmland until we reached the Grand Union Canal. A short distance along

the canal, without any sign of water craft, and then we turned right and onto footpaths across more farmland once more. Then a second bridge over the Blythe. We climbed the hill up to Eastcote Grange, a series of older black and white houses and a modern development. We think that this was once a smallpox isolation hospital but now provides apartments and other housing. The gardens were very beautiful with spring flowers and tree blossom. Walking over a few more fields and along a short stretch of road we reached the River Blythe once more. We enjoyed a short walk through trees along the river bank before retracing our steps up the hill to the Bulls Head where twenty two of us had lunch.

Frances Halstead

Hill Close Victorian Gardens – April 2009

The hedged Victorian Gardens in Warwick have been rescued and are now maintained by a group of volunteers. Originally, the Victorian inhabitants of the town, whose houses didn't have gardens, developed them to provide an outdoor place to relax and grow fruit, vegetables and flowers. Several of the gardens have interesting summerhouses, four of which are now listed buildings. The Heritage Lottery Fund and other voluntary payments have helped to restore, rebuild and maintain the site but work continues.

On April 28th, a lovely sunny day, thirty-eight members of RSA visited the gardens. They were met by their hosts for the afternoon, David Howell and his colleague Rosemary. After the initial talk the party was split into two smaller groups before commencing tours of the gardens

One garden of particular interest was the meadow garden, tucked away in a corner, so that we were able to look over the fence and view all the wild flowers were growing there. It was very interesting to know that they have been able to use old records to trace the original owners of the gardens and to recreate the layouts of plots and what was grown there. The original varieties of fruit and vegetables have been recorded.

After the tours we went to the restaurant. The tea and homemade cakes, waiting for us, were delicious. Later we were free to wander around for a while and purchase plants from the stand where all proceeds go to the upkeep of Hill Close. We were also able to go into the greenhouse and talk to a volunteer who was working there as well as to another volunteer gardener who was working in the vegetable garden.

A very enjoyable afternoon.

Wendy Murray

Snowdonia – Three days in May 2009

Thanks to Chris Hall's excellent directions, three cars arrived at the appointed meeting place at Tan-y-Grisiau within ten minutes of each other after the three-hour drive from the Midlands. Sadly, the weather was not good with poor visibility, and the walk up to the Rhosydd quarry workings on the wet slate proved troublesome. It was evocative to think that these workings once hummed with men and activity, mostly done with hand labour with some help from black powder, the only memorial to their lives (and frequently death) being tunnels and caves in the rock, the ruined buildings, and the spoil heaps, not forgetting the slates on our roofs.

The eight of us then established ourselves in the hostel of the Festiniog Railway arranged by Chris in a module of eight bunk beds, dining kitchen, showers and loos, and a drying room which proved to be useful (unfortunately!) Fed, watered and happy, we retired to our bunks.



On the following day the weather was no different, except that the wind was perhaps stronger, and the party divided into the 'below the clouds' group, and the 'in the clouds' group. The former group took the walk from the hostel through village and woods to the small hamlet of Rhyd, enjoying the bluebells and other spring wild flowers on the way. The other group travelled to Croesor for the ascent of Cnicht, an elegant pointed peak when it can be seen. The visibility of 20 yards caused some navigational difficulties on the flat and

very boggy plateau after the top was reached, but a combination of GPS and compass brought the party home.

The final day dawned bright and sunny, and after a clean up of our module in the hostel, we climbed Moel-y-Gest for the views over the Porthmadog area, then drove to Tan y Bwlch to catch the steam driven train to Tan-y-Grisiau. The walk back was frequently near the railway, and we were able to wave enthusiastically to the trains as they went by. With good views, spring flowers and good walking country, we finally returned to our cars at 4:30 for the drive home. A very memorable and enjoyable three days, and many thanks to Chris and Margaret Hall for their efforts in arranging it, for their shopping and providing the excellent pre-prepared main courses, and to those who provided the sweet courses, to make it so easy for the rest of us.

Malcolm Wilding

The Lawfords and King's Newnham – May 2009

Ten members gathered at the Old Smithy in Church Lawford on another sunny day with dry ground underfoot. The route took us past the church and across fields parallel to the railway, where the trains were a hundred years more modern, and less reliable (?), than those some of us had seen a week or so before in Snowdonia. Walking through part of Long Lawford, admiring a few horses, we crossed the River Avon, which seemed to be very clear and healthy. Crossing a field, we came to a delightful area of ponds, with many wildfowl. Passing a derelict farm, and accelerating our pace as an extremely black cloud approached, we walked through Kings Newnham and re-crossed the Avon to the Old Smithy, catching only the fringe of the shower with the worst of the rain just behind us. We managed to find a corner in a very crowded pub, where various pensioner options were enjoyed.



Malcolm Wilding

Around Berkswell – June 2009



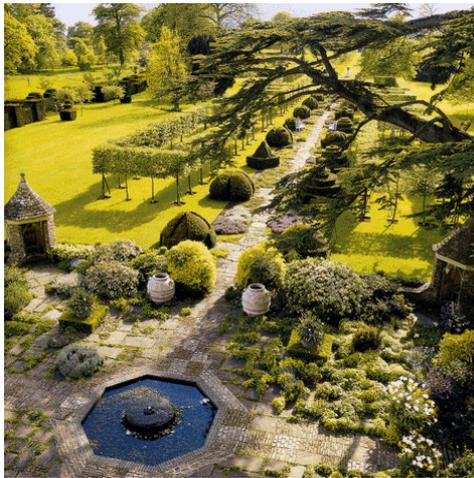
Seventeen of us gathered at the Bear Inn at Berkswell on another pleasant day, but with a weather forecast threatening the arrival of rain. The route took us north across fields to the vicinity of Meriden church, veering west towards Cornets End with views towards the skyscape of Birmingham and northwards over Meriden. The four leafed clover hunters, led capably by Janet, were in top form, and many captures were made. Paths adjacent to the extensive gravel workings were then taken southwards, followed by a pleasant section through a mature wood. Finally,

the grounds of the Berkswell estate were crossed on an excellent duckboarded section, with views over the lake to the big house, so that we all arrived for our lunch with clean boots. We were joined at the lunch by four further non-walking members, and following an excellent lunch went to our cars in the promised showers.

Janet Dale

Visit to Highgrove House, 16 April 2009

With a grey and misty start we left for Tetbury, Gloucestershire, for a tour of the Gardens at Highgrove House, the home of Prince Charles. As we approached Tetbury the weather improved and a watery sun greeted us on arrival at the gates.



We were met by two police officers who checked our credentials and the coach. We were then directed to the Orchard Room reception area to be greeted by Robert, a Highgrove official who further checked our paperwork and officially welcomed us to Highgrove. Then followed a short DVD introduction, by Prince Charles, to the estate and his work with the Prince's Trust. We were then directed into the grounds by Janet, an extremely knowledgeable garden guide.

The leisurely tour lasted one-and-a-half hours and it would be impossible to describe it in detail. It is quite a unique garden, small and intimate in some areas, bold and dramatic in others. On completion of our walk around we were invited back to the Orchard Room for a welcome cup of tea and a Highgrove biscuit and the opportunity to visit the Highgrove shop. I am sure we all had our own personal favourite memories but all agreed it was a wonderful experience.

Alan Foster

Notes and Dates for Your Diary

Membership

Currently the membership numbers for the Warwick University Retired Staff association stand at 225, down a little on last year, and rather disappointingly we had only 12 new members this year. It is a marvellous way of keeping in touch with friends and former colleagues. If anyone knows of a retired member of staff who is not a member please encourage them to get in touch with me or Suzanne Keene at the University. I am looking forward to welcoming a batch of new members.

Bill Prichard

Autumn Lunch & Annual General Meeting, 23 September 2009

Sports Pavilion – Speaker: Professor Andrew Oswald

10% Discount for WRSA Members

The University Bookshop offers a 10% discount on book purchases to WRSA members on production of Membership Card.

Future Visit to Highgrove House

I have made an application for another visit to the gardens at Highgrove House. The 'waiting list' is 2-3 years, due to its popularity with the public, and the fact that parties are restricted to 25 people (hence our 'lottery' for the April visit). Though it may be a long time coming, at least the bid is in.

Alan Foster

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