

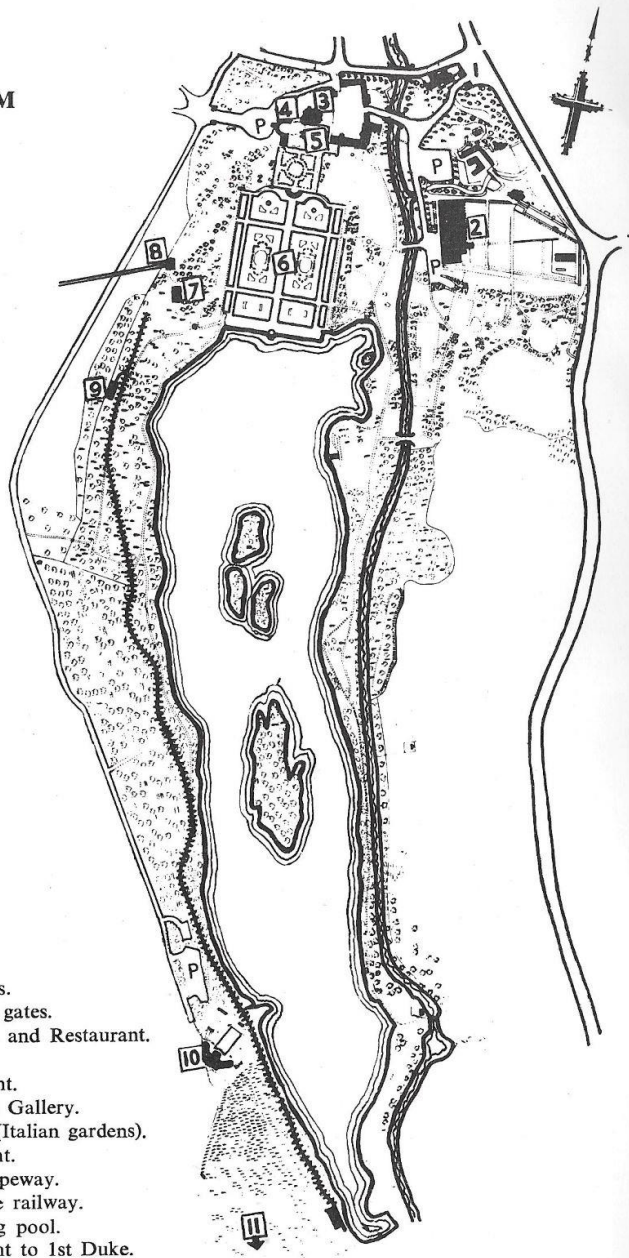
TRENTHAM GARDENS

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TRENTHAM GARDENS



KEY

- P. Car Parks.
- 1. Entrance gates.
- 2. Ballroom and Restaurant.
- 3. Church.
- 4. West front.
- 5. Sculpture Gallery.
- 6. Parterre (Italian gardens).
- 7. Restaurant.
- 8. Aerial ropeway.
- 9. Miniature railway.
- 10. Swimming pool.
- 11. Monument to 1st Duke.



TRENTHAM GARDENS

For the past 40 years Trentham Gardens have been famed as a pleasure and entertainment centre not only for the people of the nearby Potteries, but over a wide area of the country. Probably few of the thousands of visitors enjoying its present amenities today realise that, over many centuries, these grounds have had close connections with the history of England, and still show signs of their associations.

The earliest known habitation of Trentham was in prehistoric times, represented by a burial mound in Northwood Lane. From an account of the excavation in 1859 it appears to be a bell-barrow of the Beaker culture dating from 1500 - 1000 B.C. with several secondary inhumations over a long period. Unfortunately there is insufficient detail for modern, more accurate dating.

This barrow may be associated with stepped Celtic fields in the area, and with Bury Bank (about three miles south of the village). This earthwork has not been dated, but by 660 A.D. Wulphere, an Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia, had a castle or palace here called Wulpherecaster.



**Representation of St. Werburgh,
after Cahier.**

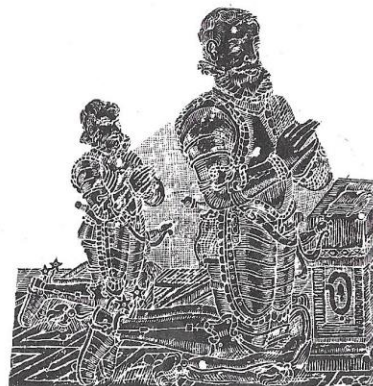
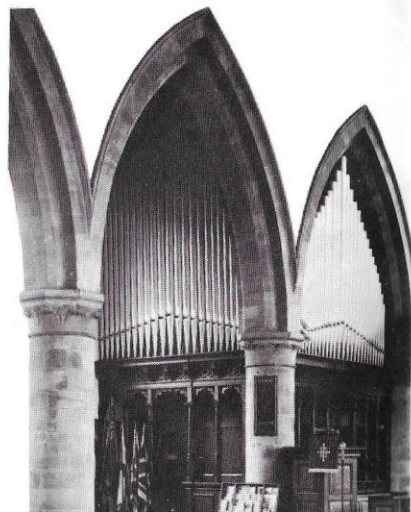
Wulphere was only nominally Christian but his daughter Werburgha was devout, later canonised and Patron Saint of Chester. She was the first Abbess of a little Nunnery established by Wulphere's brother Ethelred in 680 on the site of Trentham Church. Early foundations were discovered in 1858, and the retaining wall on the east side, best seen from the courtyard, may be part of them. St. Werburgh was buried at Hanbury but her body was removed in 875, when Danish pirates were threatening the area, and taken to Chester by way of Trentham. The shaft of a Saxon cross in the churchyard,

the base dating from this period, may mark the resting-place of her body. The Danes destroyed the church, which was re-built about 907, probably by Elfreda, daughter of Alfred the Great.

The Domesday Book (1080) records that "The King holds Trentham," as he had from early Saxon times, but William II (Rufus) gave the site of the nunnery to Hugh Lupus, 1st Earl of Chester, who established on it an Augustinian Priory. The church was restored or rebuilt in the reign of Stephen (1135-54), and the present pillars are from this church, though since re-built. The stone coffin lid in the porch, of a knight Prior, is also contemporary.

Full records exist of the Priory, which acquired great wealth and lands over the next 400 years.

**Norman pillars in
Trentham Church.**



Sir Richard Leveson, d. 1559.

The Reformation in 1536 brought this era to a close. Henry VIII resumed possession of the lands, leasing them to one Richard Trentham of the Household. Property deals were not unknown in those days, and in 1539 Henry granted the Priory and estates to the Duke of Suffolk in exchange for some land in Essex. Two days later the Duke sold the estate to Sir Thomas Pope for £2,000 who, the following year, again sold it to James Leveson, in which family it has remained.

The Leveson family is known from the time of Edward I in Shropshire, and James was one of the prosperous wool merchants whose fortunes were founded on the predominantly sheep-farming Midlands, coming from Prestwood near Wolverhampton (the house is now a Sanitorium). He was a Merchant of Staple at Calais, dealing with the export of wool to the Continent.

The Priory buildings were presumably adapted for domestic use, though no record of them survives. James' son Sir Richard and his wife appear on fine brasses on the east wall of the Sutherland chapel in the church.

A later Sir Richard was a Vice-Admiral, serving in Lord Effingham's flagship Ark Royal at the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 and commanding actions at Cadiz and Kinsale where he destroyed a Spanish fleet. His statue is in a niche of the clocktower facing the courtyard, and the masts of his ship are preserved by the estate.



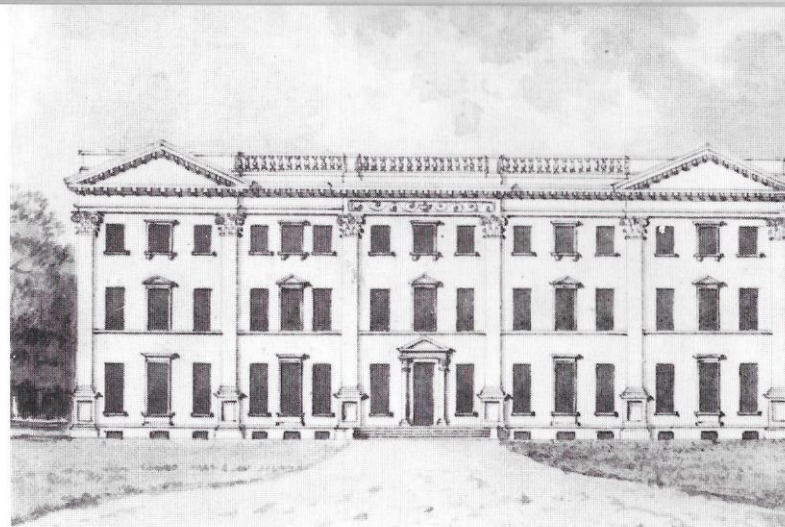
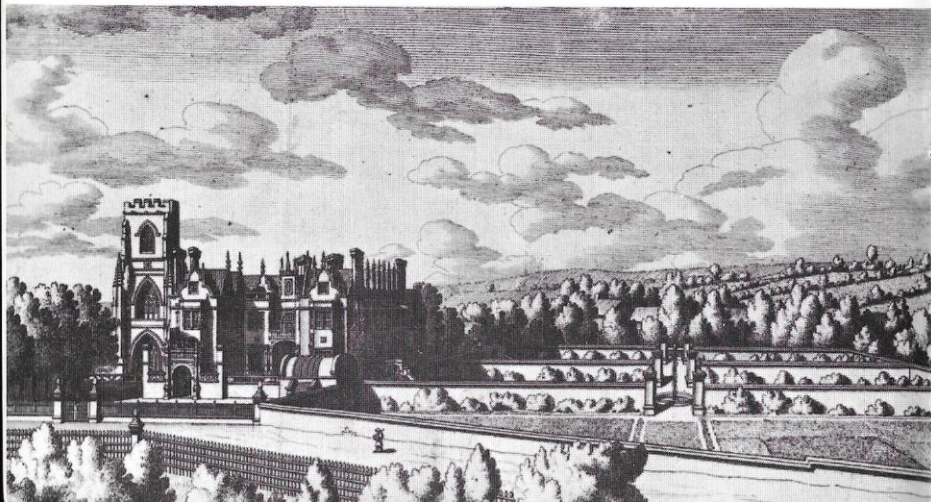
**Vice-Admiral Sir Richard
Leveson, d. 1605.**

It was not until 1630 that the old Priory was finally demolished, and a new house built on the site by a cousin, Sir Richard Leveson, K.B. He was a strong supporter of Charles I, and the house was occupied and damaged by Cromwell's Roundheads during the Civil War. The rare arms of Charles I, now over the north door of the church, show signs of bullet holes and misuse. The estate became forfeit, and Sir Richard had to pay £6,000, the largest sum Parliament ever inflicted, to redeem it.

In 1661 the estate went to a great-nephew, Sir William Leveson-Gower, in whom two great families were united. The Gowers are the older family, from Stittenham, Yorkshire, Sheriffs of that county since the reign of William I. A Gower was standard bearer at the battle of Tewksbury in the Wars of the Roses (and beheaded after it), another was in the invasion of Scotland in 1547, and a Royalist who also suffered from the Commonwealth was granted a Baronetcy in 1620.

It was Sir William's heir, John, created Baron of Stittenham in 1703, who besides improving the house, constructed the original lake. This was partly a landscape feature, though smaller and rigidly formal in shape, but more practically, it relieved the problem of the flooding of the River Trent.

4 The original house and gardens from the south west, 1686.



The house c. 1800, refaced by Brown & Holland.

His designer, Plaxton, wrote to him "As to the Pool, I assure you it will be the noblest and most profitable thing that ever was at ye house..."—though he could hardly have foreseen pleasure boats plying on it. For over 40 years there was a walk running straight down the middle of the lake to the woods beyond, till this was removed in 1746 by the 2nd Baron, then Lord Privy Seal to George II, later created Viscount Trentham and 1st Earl Gower.

His son, Granville, matched his father's political achievements as an M.P., Lord Privy Seal, a Knight of the Garter, and Marquess of Stafford (1786). He also lived up to the family penchant for marrying heiresses. A great deal of wealth had come to the family in this way, enhanced by his third wife through whom the Duke of Bridgewater's fortune and notable picture collection (worth then £150,000) were added.

Between 1769-78 the Marquess made considerable additions and alterations to the house and grounds, in keeping with his wealth and position. He employed the fashionable architects Brown and Holland to add further bays and to reface the front "from chaste and elegant designs," supposedly after the style of Buckingham House (the Palace). They were the favourite architects of Grand Whiggery, the aristocratic supporters of Charles Fox, and Holland designed the Prince Regent's original "little pavilion" at Brighton; Lancelot ('Capability') Brown revolutionised landscape gardening, as we shall see.



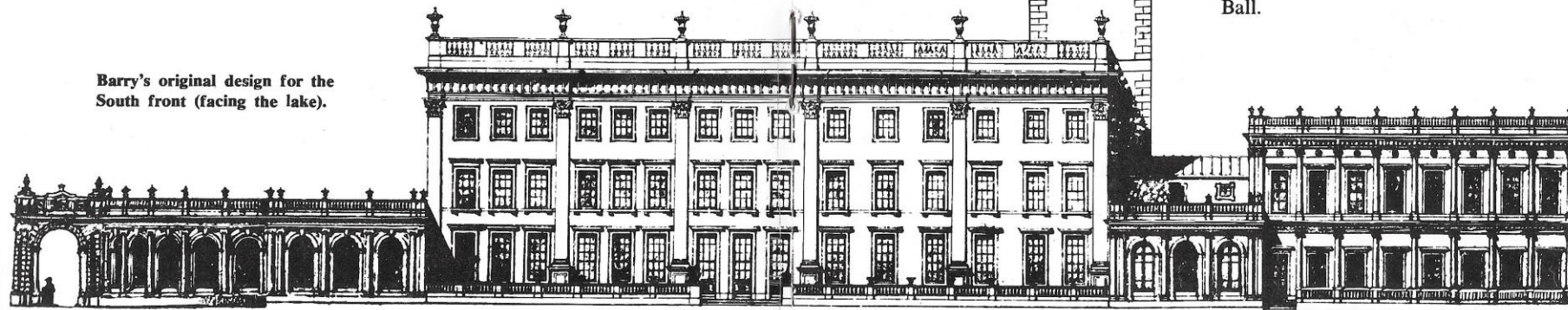
Sir Charles Barry (1795-1860), architect.

The Brown and Holland house, though impressive, was not very large for the scale of entertaining required and was plain compared with the richer, ornamented styles becoming current. The gardens, too, seemed bare (even more so by today's standards): "this great dull flat place with its immense mansion, as tame and spiritless as the ground on which it stands," quite out of keeping with Lady Harriet's temperament.

To make the transformation they selected a promising architect, Charles Barry (1795-1860). He had studied the classics abroad and, after some Gothic work, was making a name with a restrained Italianate style. His designs for Trentham and later, also for the Duke, at Cliveden, started his series of "private palaces in city and county" which culminated at Westminster with the Houses of Parliament (1836-56), which was formative of the Victorian monumental Italianate style, and for which he was knighted.

He rapidly produced designs for improving the layout of rooms which had grown over a long period and for extensions as, strangely, complete re-building was never considered.

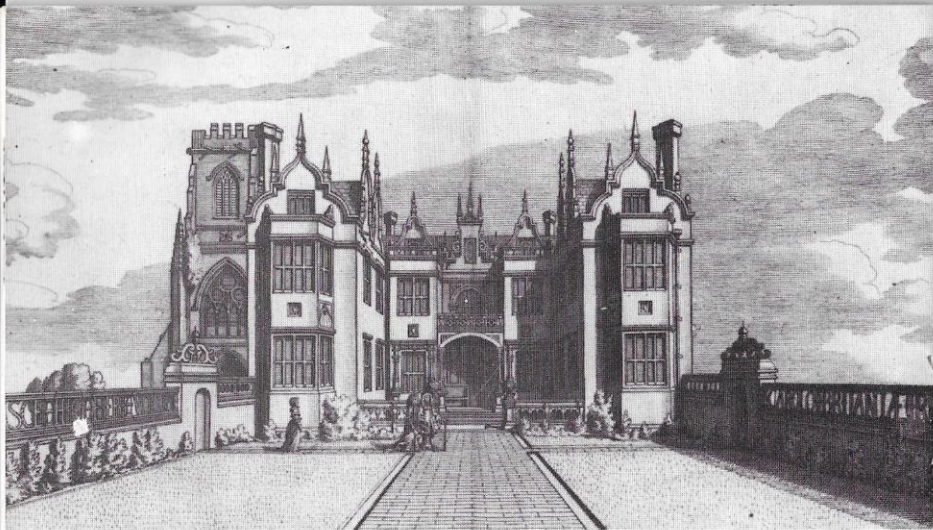
Barry's original design for the South front (facing the lake).



The old house, though looking solid on the side facing the lake, was in fact L-shaped to accommodate the church close behind it. To provide more space for the family (Lady Harriet bore 11 children) a complete new block was built to the east, leaving the main block for state apartments. Tying the two together visually was a massive central tower, the whole in a High Renaissance idiom.

Barry's estimates for the work were £40,000, nearly half of this for the gardens, and work commenced in 1834 with a labour force of 130, which in fact was to be maintained for 5 years. Progress, however, was rather slow, not least because of changes of mind by the Duke and Duchess, and it was soon obvious that more time and money would be needed.

By 1838 neither house nor garden was complete and £52,000 had been spent. The Duke and Lady Harriet were undeterred and, caught up with the joy of building, planned yet more additions on the east side. Their energy was formidable, as they were also improving Stafford House, spending much time abroad gaining new ideas and performing their public functions, the Duke as Lord Lieutenant of Sutherland and high steward of Stafford, the Duchess as Mistress of the Robes to Queen Victoria. Lady Charlotte Guest writes in her diaries that she never saw such magnificence as the Duchess of Sutherland followed by her train of handsome sons and daughters at a Palace State Ball.

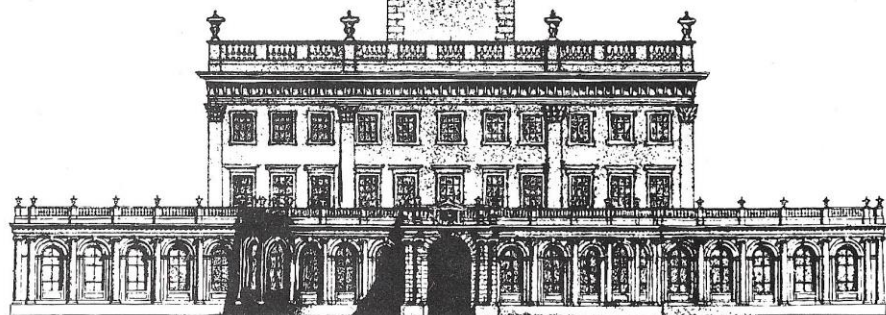


above, the West front of the original house, 1689.



left, Barry's design for the West front, 1834.

below, the West front today.

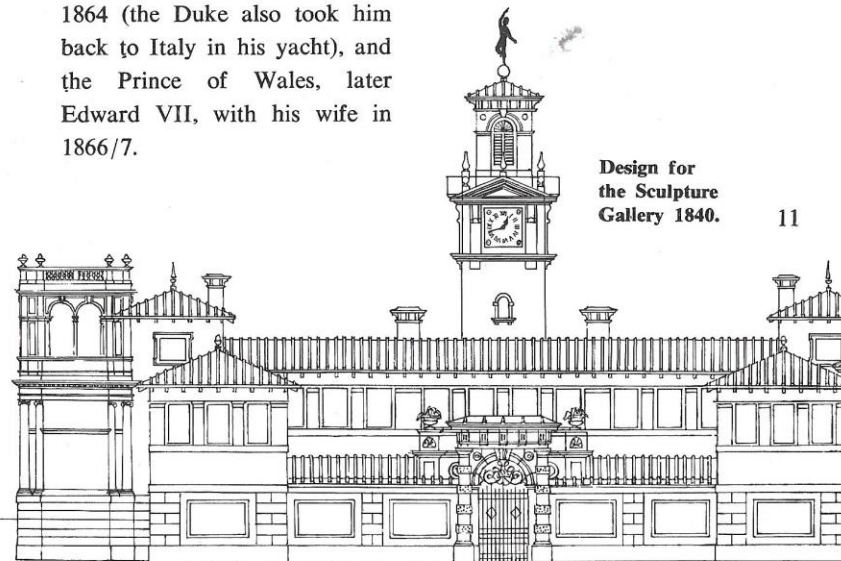


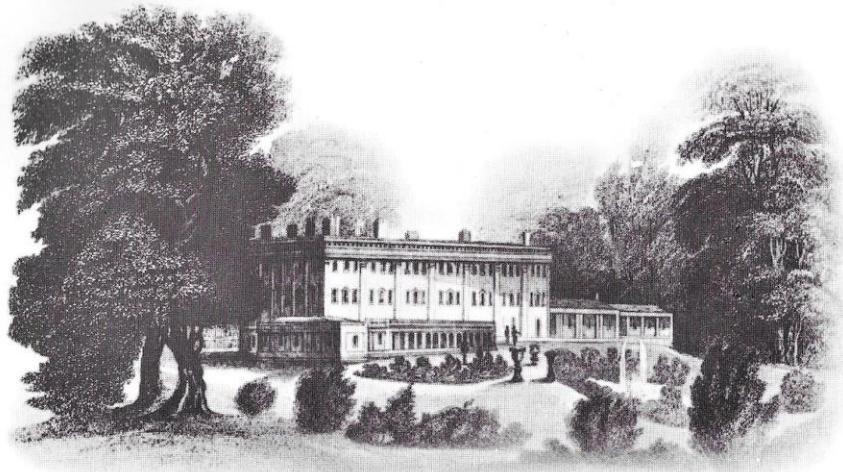
By 1840 the principal buildings were complete. Of these, only the West Front now remains, an entrance originally not much used but becoming important by the Duke's visits to Lilleshall. This aspect was unbalanced by the church (though the church tower had been pulled down in 1760), and Barry solved the problem with the impressive porte-cochère linked by curved galleries to a state bedroom block and to the main building, supported visually by the main tower centred on it.

Though expenses were still mounting, further work was put in hand providing the Sculpture Gallery, riding school, dairy and office ranges, all of which are still standing. They provided a contrast of scale and style with their broad eaves and pantiles, more provincial in feeling. They were completed in 1842 when the total expenditure had reached an estimated £123,000.

In 1861 the Duke died, to be succeeded by his son, whose wife was also Mistress of the Robes for the Queen, for which she she was made Countess of Cromartie, and at Trentham they entertained Garibaldi on his visit in 1864 (the Duke also took him back to Italy in his yacht), and the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, with his wife in 1866/7.

Design for the Sculpture Gallery 1840.





above, Capability Brown's naturalism reaches right up to the house, rather inaccurately drawn from the *South West* and published 1830. Compare with p.4 and below, the parterre replaced by Barry, photographed from the house in 1900.



The grounds as they are seen today are very similar to Barry's design, though simplified—partly from sheer economy. Apart from his under-estimating of costs, he made no consideration of running costs; the garden labour force varied from 33 to 67 and probably averaged over £200 a month.

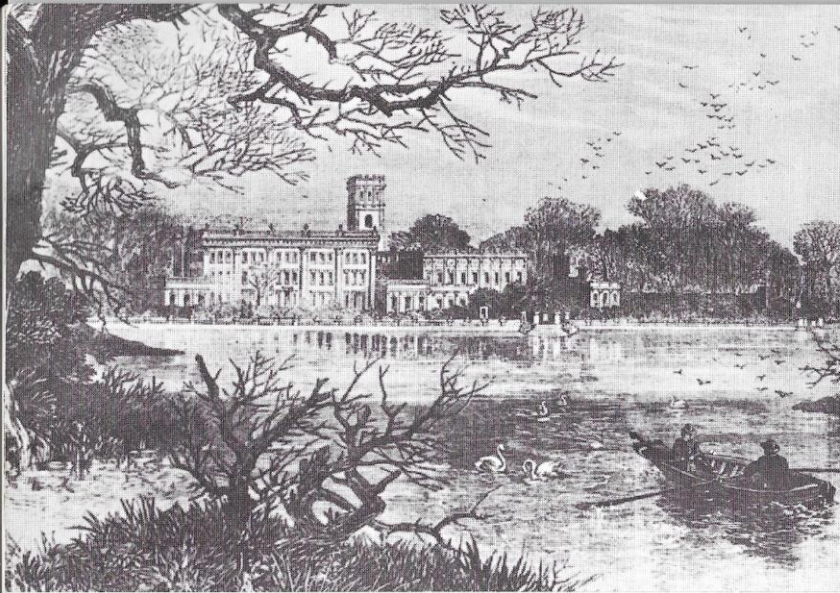
Economy aside, fashions in garden design have changed enormously over the years and fortunately Barry and his predecessors have left some traces of earlier landscape design.

The original Priory gardens would have been strictly functional, separate walled plots devoted to orchard, vegetables and herbs, perhaps with one or two native flowers. This formation was still retained, perhaps on the same ground, in the drawing of 1686 (p. 4).

The elements of the expansive Renaissance garden, typified by Versailles, were geometric-design areas (parterres) with patterns of beds edged with plants, pools and fountains, statues, arbours and great emphasis on low box hedges closely clipped or sculpted (topiary work). The main parterre at Trentham remains to give some idea of the style, though it would originally have been much more formal and complex in detail.

The revolution in style came with Capability Brown, in reaction to this severe French and Dutch influence. Straight lines were removed, trees planted in carefully designed groups to imitate and improve Nature, and lawns (long the pride of England) laid right up to the house. Most of the major gardens in the country were transformed by him or his imitators at the end of the 18th century, but tastes quickly changed, as they did in architecture. His 'natural' simplicity was thought dull and, with the introduction of new flowers and shrubs (previously very restricted in variety), there was more scope for ornamentation.

To add grandeur, Barry replaced the parterre below a fine terrace, made another at the lakeside, and provided arbours and a profusion of stone tubs and sculptures, some of which still remain.



Victorian Trentham.

By late Victorian days Trentham was taking a smaller share of its owner's time. The 3rd Duke had wide interests; this was only one of four mansions and 1¼ million acres he owned (reputedly the largest landowner in Europe) and he travelled widely—to the coronation of the Czar, to India with the Prince of Wales, to the opening of the Suez Canal. Disraeli at least, though, was a suitably impressed visitor, as he describes Trentham in his novel 'Lothair' (1870); but most of the entertaining was at Stafford House or on the Scottish estates, and this pattern was continued by the 4th Duke on his succession in 1892.

Though his wife, Duchess Millicent, was one of the great hostesses of the period, the glorious parties were seldom at Trentham where they spent only a few months each year. Then, the Duchess being fond of the new sport of cycling, guests were asked to bring bicycles (and footmen to look after them). She was also energetic in local affairs and there is a rather skittish portrait of her, as the Countess of Chell, in Arnold Bennett's novel 'The Card' (1911), with a brief description of the house 'Sneyd Hall.'

It was not merely the Duke's many public duties and world-wide travel which led to his declining interest in Trentham. The enormous rise of industry in nearby Stoke and the Potteries was causing severe pollution of the River Trent which, so close to the house, was becoming unpleasant. Finally the Duke decided the Hall was no longer economical and in 1905 it was offered to Staffordshire County and Stoke City Councils for use as an institution. These offers were not taken up, and in 1911 demolition of the house commenced.

For some time before this, the local population had been allowed into the grounds on public holidays during the owner's absence. In this, Trentham can claim to be one of the first 'stately homes' to be opened to the public, some 50 years before it was to become general practice. Brass bands would play in Wakes Weeks (local industrial holidays), and gradually people from further afield were attracted, travelling by wagonette, railway and then car.

So popular was it that, by the 4th Duke's will, trustees were set up to administer the estate as pleasure gardens and Trentham flourished to become a major entertainment centre of the 20's and 30's, catering uniquely for the Motor Car Age, jazz, dance crazes, hiking and the cult of the open air. In 1931 the Ballroom was erected, one of the largest and most lavish of its time, followed in 1935 by the swimming pool. With commendable care, these extra, lively amenities were sited so as not to disturb the peace and elegance of the gardens themselves.

AMUSEMENTS IN THE POTTERIES. AUGUST 5.

TRENTHAM

Gardens and Pleasure Grounds.

BOATING. TENNIS.
CROQUET.
BOWLS. FISHING. GOLF.

These Grounds will be OPEN to the PUBLIC
EVERY DAY
in Stoke Wakes Week, from 10 a.m. until dusk

Thursday, Aug. 10th, 1911

The Old Artillery Band

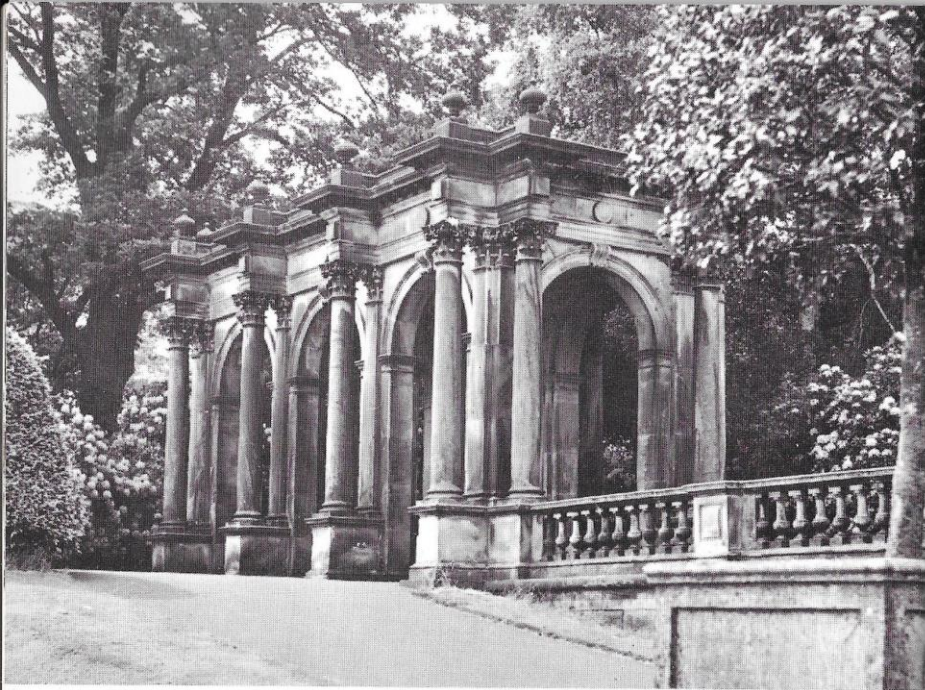
(Conductor - Mr. W. L. Glover)

Will play Selections during the Afternoon and Evening.

Teas and Light Refreshments may be obtained in the Hall at reasonable charges.

ADMISSION (to Grounds only) 6d each. Reductions to Parties exceeding 12, of 25 per cent.

Special trains at reduced fares every day, and late return trains



An elegant corner of the gardens today.

These managed to survive their part in the War Effort to re-establish their position, amidst growing competition, in the 50's. To help their popularity, the motorway is now a neighbour, and in 1963 a new luxury restaurant and bar were added to the Ballroom. Trentham keeps up with the times as it always has—instead of state visits there are national conferences here, instead of gay parties, thousands dance every night; it is still closely connected with history, but with increasing numbers of people involved.

TRENTHAM GARDENS LTD.

Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

Tel.: Stoke 57225/6, 57341-3



Acknowledgement is gratefully made to—
Mr. Stitt, County Archivist, and the Salt Library,
Stafford for access to the Trentham Papers.

The Editor of 'Country Life' for the photographs
on pages 4, 5, 6, 10 and 12, and use of the articles by
Mr. John Cornforth.

National Portrait Gallery, London, for Sir Charles
Barry's portrait.

Written and designed by Ian Anderson.
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