

North Staffordshire National Trust Association

Newsletter No. 133
Winter 2026

www.northstaffsnt.org.uk



The Great Laxey Wheel, Isle of Man

© Peter Simmons

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.

The National Trust makes insurance arrangements, including public liability insurance, for Supporter Groups that carry out volunteering/activities for the benefit of the National Trust.

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 – see further details on the inserts in the centre of this Newsletter.

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!)

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North Staffordshire National Trust Association

Newsletter No. 133 Winter 2026 Programme

A Note From The Chair



I do hope that you enjoy the Christmas and New Year festivities and now look forward to all that 2026 brings.

Never mind the dark nights, our Planning group have shone through brilliantly with some very interesting events for the next 6 months. A repeat of the successful group lunches, three coach outings to the World of Glass, the Malvern Spring Garden Festival and a visit to Wentworth Woodhouse in S. Yorkshire. The increase in the number of coach trips is in response to member requests. We also have some interesting car trips, walks and, of course, a speaker programme to suit all tastes. Finally, there is the September holiday to London, which

includes visits to 3 royal residences. Please give your support to our event planners to ensure the success that they deserve. Should you have any ideas for a future event, don't hesitate to pass on your thoughts to Helen and her group.

I feel that more people would join us if they knew what interesting events and talks we have lined up. Do tell your friends and any lapsed members that we are always looking to increase our membership. Under a fairly recent rule change it is possible to join our association without having membership of the National Trust association. Although of course we do encourage full National Trust membership.

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 website 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.

### **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January: Talk: Steve Brewer: The making of the Peak District.**

Steve Brewer taught modern languages. He is a keen walker, so when he took early retirement, he was keen to study geology. He has been attempting to piece together the geological jigsaw of the British Isles including the interesting local area of the Peak District.

### **Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> January: Social Lunch at the New Victoria Theatre.**

Something to cheer us up at the end of a winter month?

Following up on our recent pub lunch, come and join us at the New Victoria Theatre, Newcastle (ST5 0JG) from 12.00 onwards for a chat, a drink and a bite to eat. We have tables of various sizes reserved for us in the first floor bar area. Meet old friends or make new ones in a relaxed and easy atmosphere.

Many of us will be familiar with the New Vic café menu, which has everything from filled oatcakes to soup and sandwiches to mains such as lasagne, curry, ham & eggs or fish & chips. Drinks from the café or drinks from the bar!

There is no charge for members, just pay for your own food and drink. Guests will be welcomed and will be invited to make a small donation to our funds.

Please contact Nicky Adams to reserve your place(s), by email if possible please: [rjnadams@btinternet.com](mailto:rjnadams@btinternet.com), or phone me on 07851 525933, after the 10<sup>th</sup> January. As usual, if you would like a lift, let me know and I'll do my best to find one for you.

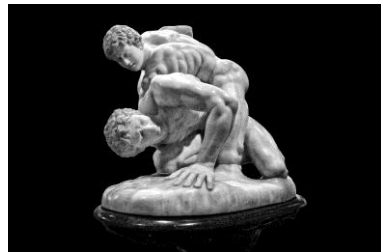
### **Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February: 2 pm Planning Meeting at Standon.**

Anyone is welcome to attend the planning meeting to put forward ideas for future events. No form to fill in, just a call or email to Helen ([helenmansell@gmail.com](mailto:helenmansell@gmail.com) / 07866 352 927) to book a seat (and refreshments!) and for directions.

## Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> February: Talk: Peter Thomas - Hedges.

These are distinctive features of the British landscape, yet many are less than two centuries old. Following a review of their history in Britain and Ireland, we will separate out the myths from the real reasons why they are important for wildlife. Along the way we will look at how hedges can be dated, what plants and animals are found most often in hedges and how we can make planting hedges more valuable for wildlife.

## Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> February: Coach Trip: The World of Glass, St Helen's.



As we depart Newcastle-under-Lyme at 9.00am on this our first coach outing of 2026 the temperatures may be cold outside but you can be assured of an interesting day and a very warm welcome by St. Helen's World of Glass. They have a collection of wares dating from Roman Times to the 20th century and the glass blowing exhibition is amazing. There are interactive sections for children and the young at heart, all about glass and its uses over the centuries. Also on display is one of the four chandeliers which used to hang in the old Terminal 2 building at Manchester Airport, two tonnes of fantastic hand blown glass, 1200 droplets blown by one man!

On arrival we shall have tea/coffee before being taken on two short introductory tours; one is to view the museum's Past Gallery, Interactive Area and Glass Exhibition, with another to view Tank House no. 9 which is where continuous glass production began. This building is Grade 2 listed, a scheduled monument and an archaeological site, where we shall learn how William Windle Pilkington perfected his continuous regenerative furnace, and explore the tunnels that brought in the gas and air that made the furnaces burn hotter and more efficiently.

We expect our buffet lunch to be served in the cafe/restaurant prior to our move to the Hot Glass Studio where we shall witness the skill of the glass blowers who will be happy to answer questions or take an order for a bespoke piece.

There will also be time to return to the galleries and museum at leisure before boarding our coach at 3.30pm with a view to arriving back in Newcastle before 5.00pm.

Cost: For Association members, this comes in at a very reasonable rate of £35 per person. For non-NSNTA, the price is £37 per person. Included in the cost is coach travel, driver's gratuity, entry fees, refreshments on arrival, a buffet lunch, guided tours, hot glass blowing demonstration and contribution to NT.

Applications from members, their families & friends, including children, are welcome. At the venue, ramps and a lift to the first floor are available to accommodate most motorised scooters. Please note on the application form any access/mobility issues, also food allergies or dietary requirements that the caterers may need to be aware of.

Please submit your application and cheque to reach us by the 11<sup>th</sup> February. Where an email address is available, that will be used for confirmation of the booking and any other correspondence that may be necessary. Otherwise, please enclose a stamped self-addressed envelope for your reply. Enquiries to Margaret Thorley – tel: 01782 411 550, email: [thorley.37@icloud.com](mailto:thorley.37@icloud.com)

## **Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> March: Talk: Ruth Plant - National Garden Scheme in Staffordshire.**

This charity started in 1927 with just 7 gardens in Staffordshire. These are large country houses with land, often associated with famous landscape designers. Now, the NGS in Staffordshire includes many private gardens with enthusiastic owners opening their gardens on specific dates throughout the summer. Entry fees go towards their chosen charity, light refreshments are often provided.

The coloured timetable of events will appear in public places soon or look for details on the website, [www.ngs.org.uk](http://www.ngs.org.uk)

## **Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March: Car Outing: Guided tour of Staffordshire Energy Recovery Facility.**

Come and discover the fascinating journey of Staffordshire's non-recyclable household rubbish that is collected, known as W2R (Waste to Resources). We shall take a guided tour to view the waste-to-energy conversion process followed by a Q&A session, so please put your thinking caps on to be able to ask questions about topics such as - the use of technology; waste reduction strategies; reuse practices; costs; environmental issues, etc.



Please aim to arrive between 9.45am & 10.00am. There will be a short introductory talk followed by our guided tour, then refreshments and a questions & answers period before bidding farewell by noon.

Taking photos is encouraged but please note: It is requested that we wear long trousers and sensible flat closed toe footwear (not crocs) as there are grated walkways and open staircases to climb. Unsuitable for buggies and people afraid of heights.

The plant is approximately an hour's drive south from Newcastle and near Junction 12 of the M6 motorway. Directions will be sent to you with the booking confirmation. Please consider car sharing because parking is limited.

Cost: £7 per person (non-NSNTA members £8) to include a guided tour and tea/coffee & biscuits. Number limited to 20; preference given to NSNTA members. No children under 7 years of age. Free on-site parking.

Please apply to Helen Mansell enclosing the booking form, cheque, and your stamped Self Addressed Envelope for confirmation of booking and travel directions to be sent to you. If you are happy to receive this information via email, then there's no need for an SAE. Enquiries: 07866 352 927; Email: [HelenMansell@gmail.com](mailto:HelenMansell@gmail.com)

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

Danny will tell us about the development of gardening in Georgian and Victorian England and the first half of the 20th century. He will explain the meanings and symbolism invested in the garden.

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

A Bluebell walk at Hem Heath followed by lunch at the Toby Inn in Trentham are planned for this date. Come for the walk of 1-1½ hours and/or the lunch. Full details will be given in the April Newsletter – please do not book till then.

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

This promises to be a visual treat all round, from the beautiful setting of the Malvern hills to the marquees full of magnificent flowering plants, inspiring show gardens, the festival of house plants and so much more. It is an event staged both indoors and out therefore you would need to be prepared... brolly and good walking shoes!

There are talks and demonstrations by well-known garden presenters and many food outlets ranging from 'artisan' street-food vendors to several sit-down venues. You could even bring your own picnic.

The coach will leave Newcastle at 9 am and will return, leaving Malvern at 4 pm.

Cost will be £48 per person (£50 non-members) to include the coach and entry ticket.

Apply to using the entry form with cheque to North Staffs NT Assoc and SAE by 6<sup>th</sup> April. All confirmations will be sent shortly after that date.

Enquiries: Sue Till, [st.till@icloud.com](mailto:st.till@icloud.com)

## **Tuesday 19th May: AGM & Talk: Paul Walton, head gardener at Biddulph Grange.**

Agenda and call for nominations etc. will be in the next Newsletter but now is not too early to be considering whether you are able to contribute to committee or other activities of the Association. We are very much in need of new blood to ease the burden on existing members and bring new ideas.

## **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June 2026: Coach trip: Wentworth Woodhouse, Sth. Yorkshire.**

This Grade 1 listed property is the largest house in the UK and the grandest. It was built in 1725 by the 1<sup>st</sup> Marquis of Rockingham and was later owned by the Fitzwilliam family. They owned several coal mines in South Yorkshire from which they became extremely wealthy, furthermore they were noted for their extravagant social lives with both royalty and other nobility. There is a fascinating must-read book about the Fitzwilliams, entitled “Black Diamond” by Catherine Bailey.



There is a fascinating must-read book about the Fitzwilliams, entitled “Black Diamond” by Catherine Bailey.

Following WW2 the family fell on hard times and left the house. It was later a teacher training college, then a physical education centre and in 1998 it was bought by the local Newbold Family, however, the family too fell on hard times. Consequently, in 2017 the Wentworth Woodhouse Preservation Trust was formed and with the aid of a government grant, the Trust proceeded to bring the house back close to its original condition. To assist with the development, The National Trust was seconded as a partner and the arrangement continues to this day. This partnership enables all National Trust Members to receive a discount of 25% on the admission price.

Upon arrival we will be served tea/coffee and biscuits, after which we will be divided into groups for a guided tour to view the grandeur of the rooms where the family once lived, entertained and made history. We will also hear stories of the dedicated staff who worked behind the scenes and learn about the intricate dynamics between the two worlds and how it shaped daily life in the house. Following the guided tour, we will then be free to wander at will through the remaining main rooms of the house.

A buffet lunch will be served in the Long Gallery, following which we are free to view once more the main rooms of the house and roam the 57 acres of gardens. It should be noted that the gardens are aligned with the RHS and during this summer, they held a garden show at Wentworth.

We depart from Brunswick Street at 8.30 a.m. and aim to be back in Newcastle by 6.30 p.m.

Cost £55 (£62 for non-NT members), including coach fare, driver's tip, entrance to the house and gardens, a guided tour, tea/coffee and biscuits on arrival and a buffet lunch.

**It is imperative that you bring your National Trust membership card to qualify for the reduced price.**

Please apply to Bob Winter, enclosing the booking form, cheque and SAE. Enquiries: 07783321209 or [robert.winter14@btinternet.com](mailto:robert.winter14@btinternet.com)

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



One of our nearest National Trust properties is the 26-acres, grade I listed garden created by the horticulturist James Bateman and his wife Maria to display exotic plant specimens collected from around the world. The garden has themed areas linked by stone & gravel paths, steps and atmospheric tunnels. The stumpery, created in 1856, is the oldest in the UK and has inspired many others, including our king's at Highgrove.

Paul Walton, having worked at Biddulph Grange for over 30 years, is now the Head Gardener and he has kindly offered to conduct a guided tour for us. He remembers holding seeds in his hands which have now grown into the giant redwoods, some of which are now more than 4m in circumference and over 40m in height!

Join us on a journey through "China, Egypt, Italy and the Himalayas" and see the fish & water birds at the pond. Please beware of open water, and uneven & slippery pathways. Unsuitable for buggies as there are many steps and staircases.

Parking is free and the gate opens at 10.00am. Meet in the drawing-room - which houses the climate controlled cabinet that the NSNTA contributed towards, for tea/coffee and biscuits before our private tour of the garden at 10.45am.

After the tour we are free to wander the gardens at leisure and visit the Geological Gallery. The Camillia tea-room offers an elevated view over the garden, while the cafe - in the former billiard room, offers more substantial light lunches. Alternatively, sit outdoors on the terrace. There is a second-hand book shop – book donations are welcomed - and a well-stocked plant centre as well as a gift shop.

**Cost:** £5 per person (non-NSNTA members £6). Remember to bring your NT membership cards. If not a member of the NT, then an additional charge of £13.30 per adult / £7.00 per child will need to be paid to Biddulph Grange for admission on the day.

**Closing date for applications is 31<sup>st</sup> May 2026.** Please apply to Helen Mansell, enclosing the booking form, cheque, and your stamped Self Addressed Envelope for confirmation of booking if you require this to be posted to you. If you are happy to receive confirmation by email then an SAE is not necessary. (Enquiries: 07866 352 927; Email: HelenMansell@gmail.com)

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> August: Car Outing: Churnet Valley Railway Bombay Express Dining Train.** (Actual date will have been confirmed in December.)

A most popular attraction of the scenic Churnet Valley is the “Bombay Express” train. While stepping back in time to journey aboard the vintage steam train from Froghall to Ipstones and back, besides enjoying the picturesque views we can enjoy a freshly prepared summer meal together of exotic cuisine, beautifully cooked curry and other authentic side dishes. The friendly Heritage Railway team provides full table service throughout the journey in beautifully restored dining carriages. The train has a fully licenced bar for the purchase of drinks.



#### MENU

##### **Appetisers:**

Poppadoms & Chutneys

##### **Starters:**

Chicken Tikka Pieces with Salad

OR

Onion Bhajis, Vegetable Samosa, Vegetable Pakora

##### **Mains (all served with Basmati rice & Naan bread):**

Spinach, Chickpea & Lentil Dahl

OR

Chicken Tikka Masala

OR

Chicken Jalfrezi

OR

Lamb Rogan Josh

##### **Dessert:**

A selection of traditional Baklava with Fresh Fruit & Berries

Please indicate on the booking form each person's choice of starter and main course. Tables are in bays for 6 diners (comprising a table for 2 and a table for 4). Tables for two will be allocated on a first come, first served basis, but please give the names on your booking form of others if you would like to be seated with anyone in particular, and we will do our best to accommodate requests.

**Restrictions:** You may request a vegetarian option and/or gluten free – see the application form. However, we are sorry but they are unable to offer vegan, dairy free, nut free or halal meals. Also, due to the structure of the train, unfortunately there is no access for wheelchairs or walking frames.

Meet on the platform via the booking office of Froghall Station, ST10 2HA, at 1.00pm for **departure at 1.30pm prompt**, returning at approximately 3.40pm. There is ample free car parking at the station.

The popularity of this adventure is such that bookings are taken by the railway well in advance but **at the time of printing this Newsletter, the Churnet Valley Railway are unable to determine whether the event will be on 15<sup>th</sup> or 22<sup>nd</sup> August, so please indicate your availability on the booking form. We shall contact you a.s.a.p. to inform you of the settled date.**

**Cost:** £40 per person (non NSNTA members £41). Number limited to 36; preference given to NSNTA members. Closing date for receipt of cheques is Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February. **Regrettably, after this refunds cannot be given unless we have a waiting list. The cheques for those people able to go will be cashed in March.**

Please apply as soon as possible to John Pedrazzini, enclosing the booking form, cheque and your stamped SAE for confirmation of booking/return of cheque if required. (Enquiries: 07594 599 375; Email: johnpedrazzini@yahoo.co.uk)

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> - Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September: Holiday: Royal Residences & Gardens of London.**

- ❖ 3 nights half board stay at the 4\* Grim's Dyke Hotel, Harrow
- ❖ Entry & audio tour of Hampton Court Palace and grounds
- ❖ Entry to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew
- ❖ Entry to Kensington Palace
- ❖ Free time in central London
- ❖ Entry to NT Cliveden
- ❖ Boat trip on the River Thames
- ❖ Executive coach travel from local departure points

By now we were hoping to be able to confirm that this holiday is viable and will go ahead. We believe that we do have sufficient numbers but please let Regent know as soon as possible if you are interested just to make sure. You will see from the reports

below how successful the Isle of Man holiday was and we would welcome as many more as possible to make up a full coach on this trip.

Booking details were distributed to members in the Summer - further copies are available on our website or from Regent Travel 01785 818202, [tours@regent-travel.co.uk](mailto:tours@regent-travel.co.uk) to whom bookings must be made.

## *Invitation To Members*

You are most welcome to join us at the next planning meeting, to be held at 2pm on Thursday the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, where a group of us will be arranging forthcoming events.

If you would like to get involved or have any suggestions, please contact Helen Mansell ([helenmansell@gmail.com](mailto:helenmansell@gmail.com) / 07866 352 927).

We are always anxious to know members' views on the activities of the NSNTA. If you cannot attend please pass your comments on to Helen or any member of the committee.

## *Membership*

We have pleasure in announcing and welcoming the following who have joined since we last welcomed new members: Barbara Dixon, Janice Tavernor. Current Membership is 219.

**NT Membership Discount** A reminder that a discount on the general National Trust membership subscription is available to eligible members – see Newsletter 110 or their website for more details.

## *Photographic Archives*

A reminder that Kay Williams would be grateful for some photos/leaflets from visits when she is not there herself; prints or digital images are equally acceptable. See inside the back cover for Kay's contact details.

The editor acknowledges and thanks contributors of photographs included in this issue, and also for any photos sent but not used. Any photographs submitted will also be passed on to Kay for possible use in the archives, and may be used on the NSNTA website for record or publicity purposes. Copyright (which must be owned or obtained in writing by the submitter) is acknowledged for all images even if not stated in the magazine. Please contact the editor if more details of any item are required.

The images included in the Newsletters do not do justice to most events so do check the website (see list of past outings on the Archive page) for additional photographs and all to a higher resolution than can be reproduced here. These include a good selection from the Isle of Man holiday. Apologies for those still missing for other recent events – it is hoped to add these in the not too distant future.

## *Reviews of Recent Events*

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August: Car Trip: Halfpenny Green Vineyard.

On a lovely sunny morning 16 members met in the courtyard of this winery. Helen welcomed us and we set off to a nearby row of vines. Helen explained the vineyard began in 1983 with farmer Martin Vickers' vision of growing grapes on half an acre. Today, his son Clive produces award winning still and sparkling wines on 30 acres – one of the largest vineyards in the UK. The vines are grown 250ft above sea level on well sheltered south facing slopes, with light sandy, free draining soil.

After phylloxera decimated European grape vines, all vineyards now graft their better grape varieties onto American root stock, which is resistant to this nasty infection. The grapes are grown, trained and pruned into shape throughout the growing period allowing sunlight to ripen them and facilitate harvesting.

At Halfpenny they have just started harvesting some of the grapes - the season is advanced this year due to changes in the climate. The pickers are mostly local volunteers (but no longer used to press the grapes with their feet!). The grapes are fed into presses, gentle for whites harder for reds, then specialist yeast is added to the juice to ensure correct fermentation occurs to convert the grape sugar into alcohol and carbon dioxide under careful temperature controls in stainless steel tanks. After ageing, shorter time for whites, the wine may be blended and then bottled.

We were invited to taste some of their wines: champagne style "Brut", white, rosé and red.

We briefly wandered around the shops, craft outlets and restaurants, many of us taking the opportunity to purchase the wine at discounted prices before enjoying afternoon tea with delicious scones served with clotted cream and jam. We thanked Helen for her company and excellent presentation and set off for the drive home.

*Anne Plant*



## Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> August – Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September: Coach Holiday: Douglas, Isle of Man.

The idea of arranging an NSNTA holiday to the Isle of Man occurred to David and Cynthia Dumbelton after their own visit to the island on a coach holiday some two years ago and they were so impressed by a place of great individuality and great history that we all know something about but, perhaps, have never been there. This would appeal to our fellow members, we thought.

It's a place with its own independent government, laws, currency etc, not part of the United Kingdom but tied closely to it. It's a place of individuality and bags of history; it's a place that is litter-free and graffiti-free (yes, really) and it's a place of noisy motor bikes (at certain times of the year).

Our five-day holiday was enjoyed by 47 members (it was 50 until unfortunate last minute accidents and illnesses affected the final number) and their experiences and feelings are expressed in the following day-by-day reports. We hope that you will enjoy reading them.

*David and Cynthia Dumbelton*

### Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> August - Day 1: Barton Grange Garden Centre.

Our first holiday with the North Staffordshire National Trust Association and hopefully the first of many.

Our holiday was expertly arranged by Cynthia and David and with some help from others ticking off names, no-one was left behind and we set off from Staffordshire for our five day Dinner, Bed and Breakfast stay on the Isle of Man.

Our driver from Hollinshead Coaches, Biddulph, was Steve – he was excellent and we were very impressed with how well he negotiated the narrow lanes on the car deck of the ferry and the narrow country lanes on the island.

Our mid-morning break at Barton Grange Garden Centre was very enjoyable although we didn't get



to find out what is quirky about the Gents toilets! You can buy a



life-sized horse statue there for a mere £3,000 although I'm convinced that I could purchase at least two real live donkeys for that price!

We boarded the ferry at Heysham and the crossing was quite smooth with the occasional squally shower. Cynthia and David had gone the extra mile in terms of arrangements and we all had reserved front-facing seats in the bow lounge.

The Sefton Hotel is very comfortable indeed with good sized rooms most with furnished balconies overlooking the central atrium. The rooms were clean and well equipped and we were just five minutes' drive from the ferry port. The food was plentiful and well presented with a good choice of dishes. I think the kitchen staff were a little taken by surprise by the number of guests choosing the fish option on our first night but apologies for running out of the fish were forthcoming. All the staff were pleasant if a little slow at times but we're a patient lot!



After dinner, Trevor Gibbs (our Blue Badge Guide for the duration of the holiday) gave a brief history and overview of the island. He's a mine of information interspersed with many humorous anecdotes.

It was good getting to know our fellow travellers - the rest of the holiday promised not to disappoint and it didn't. Many thanks to Cynthia and David for an excellent holiday.

*Wendy Warrilow*

## Friday 29<sup>th</sup> August - Day 2: Laxey and Peel.



It was a bright sunny morning on the Friday for our first big adventure on the island. Steve, our driver, was taking us, first to the Great Laxey Wheel and then after to the west coast town of Peel. We set off along the prom from our lovely Sefton Hotel in Douglas, first passing the horse drawn tram and then the electric tram to Ramsey in the north. The Great Laxey Wheel was very impressive indeed, having been freshly painted especially for

our visit! This working water wheel is still the largest in the world at 72'6" in diameter, only it wasn't working for us due to regular maintenance – just our luck!

The wheel is raised up on the hillside and fed by a multi-arched long aqueduct, the whole structure painted in red and white. I just about made the climb up the 95 steps around the tower to get to the top and take in the wonderful views.

Steve then took us back via Douglas in order to find a way over to Peel avoiding a race with motorbikes that could reach speeds of over 180mph! The small town of Peel came as a lovely surprise as it sits in a fine sweeping sandy bay with a castle on an island to the south and a rocky headland to the north. I headed up the hill to visit the Victorian church of St. German, now known as the Isle of Man's cathedral which has the most beautiful polished stone floor in which there was an inlaid time line recording the saints through the ages.



Just as impressive was the fortified island known as Peel Castle accessed across a swing bridge at the entrance to the harbour which reminded me very much of St. Mary's on the Isles of Scilly known as 'The Garrison'. Sadly time prevented a look around as I wanted to get back to visit the House of Manannan. This is a wonderful museum devoted to the Celtic and Viking settlements down the western side of Britain. Having visited a turf roof

building on our stopover on the way up to Heysham, I was particularly interested to see examples of Celtic earth houses with their turf roofs. It reminded me of the dens we built as kids in Penkhull next to the Village Hall. The highlight though was 'Odin's Raven', a full size replica of a Viking Longship.

Steve then managed to round up all 47 of us to get us safely back to Douglas via a stopover at St. Johns for tea and chocolate cake in pottery from Stoke. The day then ended with yet another delicious meal back at the Sefton Hotel finished off with a nightcap and off to bed for a good sleep before our next adventure!

*Dave Broome*



## Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August - Day 3: Gaiety Theatre / Free day.

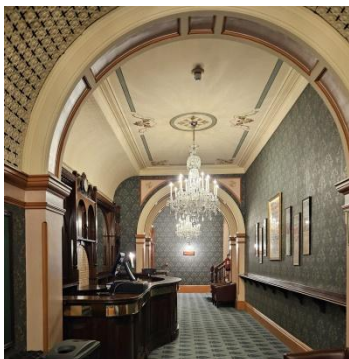
30 members attended the guided tour of the Gaiety Theatre, and were welcomed in the foyer by Mike who narrated a history of the building, formerly a dance hall, which opened 1893, failing in three months, then a second enterprise failed five years later. In 1899 new owners engaged Frank Matcham, famed for opulent Victorian era theatre design and restoration, to develop it. It reopened as The Gaiety Theatre 16th July 1900 with The Telephone Girl a West End production. The theatre enjoyed success until the island became an internment camp during the first world war.



Audiences declined during the 1920s, eventually cinema equipment was installed in 1931. During the second war, the island again became an internment camp, but the theatre continued to show films, under austerity conditions.

Post war, audiences decreased owing to the gaining popularity of television, consequently in 1968 the owners proposed to redevelop the almost derelict theatre, with plasterwork falling, as a car park. Fortunately it was purchased by the Manx Government, who sanctioned essential restoration in 1976. Finally in 1990, under direction of manager Mervin Stokes, a comprehensive restoration began to replicate its opulent 1900 condition with authentic paint colours, wallpaper and carpet patterns, derived from original records, architectural drawings, newspaper cuttings, also remnants of fallen plaster work and fragments of stained glass.

The restored theatre opened 16<sup>th</sup> July 2000 with a repeat of the Telephone Girl, and is now celebrating its 125<sup>th</sup> year. It is supported by the Friends of the Gaiety and continues with productions of musicals, drama and opera.



Commencing from the foyer with four separate box offices to prevent classes mingling, we were lead through a corridor illuminated by three opulent chandeliers to the auditorium. Surrounded by original artifacts and ornate plasterwork, we were seated to view the beautiful 1899 Act Drop curtain by the artist Hemsley. Then the main curtains were demonstrated, which rise as they are drawn apart. Above us was the beautiful domed ceiling, behind us wide cantilevered ornate balconies with no supporting pillars, and tiered seats offering excellent views.

After visiting the stage, we were taken below to view the unique wooden and rope machinery which operates the six stage traps, including the unique Corsican trap which allows an actor to rise through the floor of the stage whilst traversing to the right creating a ghostly appearance.



We then went up stairs to take in the views from the balconies and cabinets displaying



costumes from past performances.. Finally we were shown the restored projection equipment before descending to the foyer to thank Mike for his informative & interesting tour of the only remaining Macham theatre restored to original condition.

Many thanks Cynthia for arranging this add-on to the Isle of Man Holiday.

*John Pedrazzini*

My plan for the free Saturday was to visit Ramsey, then return to Douglas and explore the Manx Museum. The day started badly, in that I realised I had left my waterproof on the coach, despite knowing the weather forecast was not good, and I failed to catch the driver at breakfast, and also left the hotel minus even a cardigan! I then enjoyed the short ride on the horse tram, continuing to Ramsey, via Laxey, on the electric train. Wonderful scenery, with spectacular views down to the sea, a very interesting ride. I didn't potter far in Ramsey, because of my bad knee, just investigated some shops on the main street, before returning to the train station after some lunch. Extraordinarily, I met a couple who had been on my previous holiday to the Lake District!



Then, the rain started on the return journey, and was a deluge by the time we reached Douglas. We switched to the horse tram, but disaster struck: it was clearly not in the right

stopping place, so an official tried to push it into place, only for it to derail and in fact the rails were broken! No harm done to the horse, or passengers. We sheltered in the ticket office, before braving the storm to cross the road to a bus. Luckily I had a small umbrella, which sheltered me in my t-shirt!! until I reached the Sefton, very damp, and, of course then not venturing out again. Quite exciting, I suppose!

*Kay Williams*

## Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> August - Day 4: Train and Cragneash etc.

A short ride from the hotel and our coach dropped us at the Isle of Man Steam Railway station in Douglas, near the docks; the impressive red-brick building was constructed over 100 years ago. The line runs from there to Port Erin in the south of the island, a 16 mile journey taking an hour. The engine and rolling stock also date from over a hundred years ago but were in pristine condition.



This line was a popular tourist destination from the start running through open farmland which was very green compared to that at home after our hot, dry summer.

We were hauled by engine number 4, Loch, the fourth engine delivered to the railway in 1874. It was rebuilt in 1909 as a medium-boilered locomotive to give it more haulage capacity. It certainly made light work of the train we were on. It is a tank engine – and the similarity to Thomas the Tank Engine is no coincidence because the Rev. Awdry, who wrote that series, was inspired by the Island's railways, the station at Port Soderick, just 3 miles from Douglas being the inspiration for his island Sodor. The carriage we were in was still in original condition, as evidenced by the scumbling on the woodwork – see photo. This reminded me of my grandfather's home: as a coach painter, the woodwork in his house was similarly adorned.



We carried on through Santon, the last example of a wooden station dating back to 1874. The line works its way through farmland providing views across to Ronaldsway Airport, served by a halt opened in 1987. At Ballasalla, the crew used to draw water from the Silverburn alongside in previous times. At Castleton, the engine driver is given the staff which authorises him to pass onto the single-track section, passing halts at Ballabeg and Colby and then to Port St. Mary, a popular stop for those who



want to walk round the harbour. Soon we arrive at Port Erin where we were able to visit a small Railway Museum with interesting engines and carriages. It was a short walk to the picturesque harbour.

From there, our coach took us to the Sound, whence we could see the Calf of Man, separated from the mainland by a fast running channel. It was extremely windy and the sea was very rough. We did not see any seals (*but others did [ed]*). We had lunch with a sea view and there was a further chance to sample the national dish of Queenies.



After lunch, we were taken to Cregneash, a picturesque village with thatched Manx cottages - the first open air Folk Museum in the British Isles and a living example of a



farming and crofting community in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of the cottages are still inhabited today but are private residences. The occupants can modernise the interiors but the exteriors must

maintain their original appearance. We visited Harry Kelly's cottage. Harry had seen no need to modernise the interior and it has been kept as it was when his nephew inherited in 1935 and donated it to the Isle of Man government. The cottage had just



two rooms on the ground floor, a bedroom with a cot and double bed and the

living room with a dresser, well stocked with crockery, a large fireplace where cooking was done, a grandfather clock, spinning wheel, table and chairs. A ladder led up to a broad shelf at the edge of the living room where the children slept.

We also visited Church Farm which had been modernised and extended over the years. We were given a most interesting talk about Manx customs and traditions. It was believed there were good and bad fairies. If children were naughty they were threatened with the bad fairies. Lustreware ornaments were taken to market and traded for food and other essentials at the end of May when supplies would have run low. Any surplus produce from the farm later in the year was taken to market and traded for ornaments to set against next year's needs. Women who were accused of witchcraft were taken to the top of Tyndwold Hill and rolled down in a barrel with knives sticking out on the inside. If they survived they were deemed to be witches and in theory would be burned at the stake. Actually this only happened once in 1617 when such an upset was caused amongst the islanders that subsequently warnings were given rather than punishment. Manx cats are well known as having no tails (Rumpies) but there are also Stumpies with a short stump of a tail. One of our group saw a Rumpy. Cregneash is also famous for goats with 4 or 6 horns.

We then drove on to Castleton, the Manx capital until 1869, where some of us walked round the old square, before taking the road back to our hotel.

*Pauline & Roger Savage*

## Monday 1<sup>st</sup> September - Day 5: Carnforth and Home.

It was 6.15 am and an early start, cases out for loading followed by breakfast. What a super few days on the Isle of Man.

Cynthia and David have done us proud, a varied itinerary, a super very knowledgeable guide, excellent hotel and a great holiday.

We boarded the ferry at 7.45 for an 8.30 departure. It was eventually nearer 9 as they were loading extra because the previous night the ferry was cancelled, strong winds! So pleased it was a little calmer today.

After quite a good crossing we disembarked at Heysham and headed for Carnforth railway station and museum. We were a little late but safe. Lunch was provided, soup and sandwiches and a short talk about the museum. We then had the opportunity to tour the museum and exhibition. This was where the



famous station tea room was filmed for Brief Encounter. The clock had gone but they are making a replica which will soon be on display. The film was being shown so one could have sat back and watched it had there been time.



Then it was back on the coach for the journey home, just under 2 hours. M6 was no problem. Steve was a very competent driver and we had all admired his skills when dealing with some very difficult turns, narrow roads and of course on and off the ferry.

Thank you to all who helped to make this a memorable trip especially Cynthia and David. What's next?

*Val Morgan*

## Monday 8<sup>th</sup> September: Car Trip: Wollerton Old Hall Garden, Market Drayton.

I had visited this garden many times in the last thirty years but today's visit was very special. On arrival we were greeted by a young lady with a broad smile and served hot drinks and biscuits. We were then taken by Mr. Jenkins to the 15<sup>th</sup> C part of the old hall which is rarely seen by visitors and he told the story of how his wife, Lesley had spotted the For Sale board in 1982. She remembered living there in



her childhood so they bought it and moved in with their two sons. John's main interest is vegetables but Lesley had trained as an artist and theatre designer so it was her skills that brought the horticultural display together.

We were taken round the garden, still full of beautiful colours and I was pleased to see roses and late flowering perennials as well as many dahlias. After the tour we were treated to a delicious lunch followed by cake and coffee. The weather was kind and everyone had a good time, many going home with plants they had bought. It reminded me of the time around thirty years ago when I persuaded the head gardener to sell me a dahlia tuber which still flourishes in my garden!



Many thanks to the organisers of this memorable outing.

*M Akhtar*

## **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> September: Talk: Shaun Farrelly - James Brindley. the father of British canal engineering.**

We welcomed Shaun back to give us another of his detailed presentations - this time regarding a man of history who was famous in the area and throughout the country, as a pioneer of the canals as we know them.

Brindley was born in a little village, Tunstead, in Derbyshire in 1716, the son of a millwright. He assisted his father as much as he could, but he was quite clumsy at times and was nicknamed "The Bungler". However, in 1726, his family moved to Leek, by which time he was far more capable so that, in 1734 he started a millwright apprenticeship and within 8 years he became self-employed. In 1750 he rented a Wedgwood workshop in Burslem and quickly made many important contacts. He came to be known as a man who understood the power of water and how to manage it.

Two years later he was commissioned to advise on wet earth management at Clifton colliery and this was followed by a much bigger task, to survey a route for a proposed Trent Canal. In 1760, his expertise and reputation were such that he gave evidence to the House of Lords about the Bridgewater Canal. In 1766 he was appointed surveyor-General for the Trent and Mersey Canal with the first sod being cut in July of that year.

His increasing fame meant that he was commissioned to work on many other canals, such as the Oxford Canal, Chesterfield Canal and the Staffordshire and Worcester Canal plus surveying for many others. He was fully committed to his work such that his health began to suffer, caused particularly by his exposure to bad weather during his surveying tasks, and he died on September 27th, 1772.

The country-wide system of canals and rivers which Brindley (and others) created still largely exists as a mark of his expertise and ingenuity and were the basis of major increases in trade, communications and prosperity although their importance was significant until challenged the following century by the arrival of steam railways. Today, the canal system is still busy but with pleasure boats and only occasionally commercial work.

If you want to see a statue of Brindley there is one at the junction of the Caldon and Trent and Mersey Canals at Etruria.

*David Dumbelton*

### Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> September: Social: Lunch at The Hand and Trumpet.

25 members met for lunch, and a good time was had by all. We had four sociable tables with between 6 and 8 people on each.

A couple of hours of good food, a little wine for some, and plenty of good conversation. Job done, and we look forward to the next event!

*Nicky Adams*



### Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> October: Talk: Rob Pointon - All the Queen's Horses and All the King's Men.

Rob is very proud of his origins here in North Staffordshire. He grew up in Blythe Bridge, went to Aberystwyth University then the Royal Drawing School in London. He has been a professional artist for 20 years, painting mainly outside ("en plein air") in oils. He particularly enjoys dynamic subject matter and wide-angle perspectives. He has held the titles of "Artist in Residence", including the Canal River Trust, Manchester Airport and the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. He explained that this official sounding title opens doors to other opportunities.

He was in the right place at the right time to be invited to paint in London 2020-2024. He already had experience of painting crowds e.g. football stadiums, airports and railway stations, then, when he was sketching in Whitehall, he met a staff member from the Lifeguards. He was asked to be the Artist in Residence with the Household Cavalry in 2020, not knowing what would happen next. Covid arrived, so there were no crowds, then Queen Elizabeth II died and the following year, there was the Coronation of King Charles III. None of the officers were allowed to pose for him, but the horses and staff in Whitehall stood perfectly still for an hour at a time while surrounded by the public. At the daily guard change, there are 10,000 - 20,000 spectators.

Rob had a staff lanyard which allowed him into many areas, including at Windsor Castle. In the summer, the horses from Whitehall have a short holiday by the sea in Norfolk. Rob painted 40 of them enjoying the waves together. We saw his work in a forge with fires and sparks in a smoke-filled atmosphere.

The original 12 months of the Residency extended to 18 months for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. Rob worked from the Press Gallery for Trooping the Colour.

Sadly, his next project was the Lying in State of the Queen at Westminster, with a queue of 10 miles.

On the Coronation Day of King Charles III, Rob found a good composition at Trafalgar Square, looking along Whitehall towards Big Ben. He had two large canvases, which were taken to the Royal Chelsea Hospital, founded by King Charles II, 350 years ago.

This was an excellent talk with lots of slides, some showed the stages in making paintings, including tonal paintings. We heard about finding good compositions from privileged areas or jostling with the crowds for a space for his easel, then carrying away the large wet oil paintings in the rain.

I shall look forward to hearing more about Rob's career as a local artist after this amazing time in London.

*Anthea Bond*

### Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October: Car Trip: Keele Observatory.

This was a fascinating visit that was well attended. We had the opportunity to view through a huge telescope the craters on the moon, Saturn, complete with rings, and Jupiter.

As well as the observatory crew, who were all volunteers and supervised our individual viewing



of the telescopes, we were fortunate to have several Keele University students in attendance. They were mainly studying astrophysics and were extremely knowledgeable and so enthusiastic which helped us understand more fully the science behind what we saw. Unfortunately, we did not see the International

Space Station as at the time of the visit, its appearance was some 2 hours before dawn. How fortunate we were that it was a fairly clear night and dry. Particularly as the main telescope roof was open to the elements!



To many of our members the visit proved to be a revelation. Having lived on the doorstep for most of their lives, they now had the opportunity to visit and learn about this impressive facility to explore the universe!

*Bob Winter*

## Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> November: Car Trip: Repeat visit to Stafford History Centre.

For a full account of the first visit last April see the Autumn 2025 Newsletter. Many thanks to John Skinner for these photographs and additional comments made after the repeat visit.

The entrance to the light and spacious exhibition area. At the time of the visit a very interesting display of items showing Staffordshire's connection with the slave trade and its abolition could be viewed.



The behind the scenes tour included access to the Conservator's well equipped room (with strict instructions not to touch). Our guide, curator Sarah English, pointing out the tools of the trade that the Conservator had kindly laid out for us. The red folders to the right are books of condolence following the late Queen's death, brought together from across Staffordshire and awaiting gold tooling.

The Centre has three strong rooms, holding 9 miles of documents, with methods of controlling temperature and humidity being improved with each new addition. Version three has yet to be populated as several months have to elapse before conditions stabilise. The three threats to the archive



are flood, insects and fire. A fire detection tube passes through the strong rooms measuring temperature and carbon levels. A battery of giant cylinders release gas throughout the rooms to suppress any fire detected.

*John Skinner*

## **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> November: Talk: Steve Booth - Staffordshire and the coming of the Tudors in 1485.**

Steve spoke to us in March about the Dukes and Duchesses of Sutherland. This time he turned back the clock nearly 350 years for a vivid account of the Tudors in Staffordshire.

At first, he reminded us of the difficulties between the Lancastrians with their red rose and the Yorkists with their white rose. The Wars of the Roses, 1455-1487, was a series of civil wars between the Houses of Lancaster and York. On 22 August 1485, the Lancastrians came to rule, the villain was King Richard III, formerly the Duke of Gloucester.

Some years ago, the NSNTA visited Leicester where the bones of Richard III had been found under a car park in the centre of the city. Examination of his bones showed deformity of his spine (scoliosis) and wound marks. These wounds were probably from the important Battle of Bosworth Field in Leicestershire.

Richard III's brother was King Edward IV, leader of the Yorkists. He had good health, he was tall but died suddenly of a stroke on 9 April 1483. He had 3 children, Edward, Richard and Elizabeth. The 2 princes were moved to the Tower of London where they could be considered safe, but they were not allowed to leave, they were the imprisoned Princes in the Tower. But the Princes were pronounced as illegitimate and they were murdered in July 1483, their remains were found in the Tower in 1674, then buried in Westminster Abbey.

In July 1485, the Welsh flag was shown for the first time. King Henry VII (Henry Tudor) arrived in Milford Haven and made his way north with his army of 3500 men to Aberystwyth then east to Shrewsbury. We heard about his journey to Newport, the Ancient High House in Stafford, Newcastle-under-Lyme Castle, Eccleshall Castle, Wolseley Bridge, Lichfield, Atherstone, then Bosworth Field on 22 August 1485.

Later, Henry Tudor married Elizabeth of York, daughter of King Edward IV, niece of Richard III, and after the journey through Staffordshire and the Battle of Bosworth Field, the War of the Roses ended.

Four nights before this talk, there was storm damage to the roof of the Wade Centre building, putting the Wade lecture theatre out of use. We squeezed into the Nadin room on the ground floor, battled with the visual aids equipment, then enjoyed Steve's talk!

*Anthea Bond*

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## Programme Summary 2026

### January

Tue 20<sup>th</sup> Talk: Steve Brewer: The making of the Peak District.

Tue 27<sup>th</sup> Social Lunch at the New Victoria Theatre.

### February

Thu 5<sup>th</sup> Planning Meeting 2pm at Standon.

Tue 17<sup>th</sup> Talk: Peter Thomas - Hedges.

Sat 28<sup>th</sup> Coach Trip: The World of Glass, St Helen's.

### March

Tue 17<sup>th</sup> Talk: Ruth Plant - National Garden Scheme in Staffordshire.

Thu 26<sup>th</sup> Car Outing: Guided tour of Staffordshire Energy Recovery Facility.

### April

Tue 21<sup>st</sup> Talk: Danny Wells: The English and Gardening.

Wed 29<sup>th</sup> Walk & Lunch: Bluebells at Hem Heath.

### May

Fri 8<sup>th</sup> Coach Trip: RHS Malvern Spring Festival

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

### June

Thu 4<sup>th</sup> Coach Trip: Wentworth Woodhouse, South Yorkshire.

### July

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

### August

Sat 15<sup>th</sup>  
or 22<sup>nd</sup> Car Outing: Churnet Valley Railway Bombay Express Dining Train.

### September

Mon 7<sup>th</sup>  
–Thu 10<sup>th</sup> Holiday: Royal Residences & Gardens of London.

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