

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

1700 - 1900

KEITH GOODWAY

Reproduced with permission of the author and editor from

Essays on
The History of Keele

Editor Chistopher Harrison

Published by
UNIVERSITY OF KEELE

© The University of Keele, 1986

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

Introduction

The changes which took place on the Sneyd estate at Keele during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries mirrored the changing fashions in landscaping and gardening. Unlike other estates in Staffordshire, such as Trentham, Shugborough, Sandon and Ingestre which were at times at the forefront of fashion, Keele often lagged behind. Nevertheless, it is possible at Keele to follow the major developments in taste, many of which left features that can still be recognised to-day, although modified and blurred with time.

The natural landscaping of the mid-eighteenth century; the picturesque style of the early nineteenth century; high Victorian horticulture and the sporting interest of the late nineteenth century, all have left recognisable traces in the present landscape. The estate archives for much of this time are remarkably complete and enable the story of the estate over this period of two hundred years to be told in considerable detail. It shows the way in which an old, but untitled family, little known nationally but well-respected in county society, developed an estate which was notable, although not in the first rank, in both size and income. At times the Sneyds called in professional designers, but often they

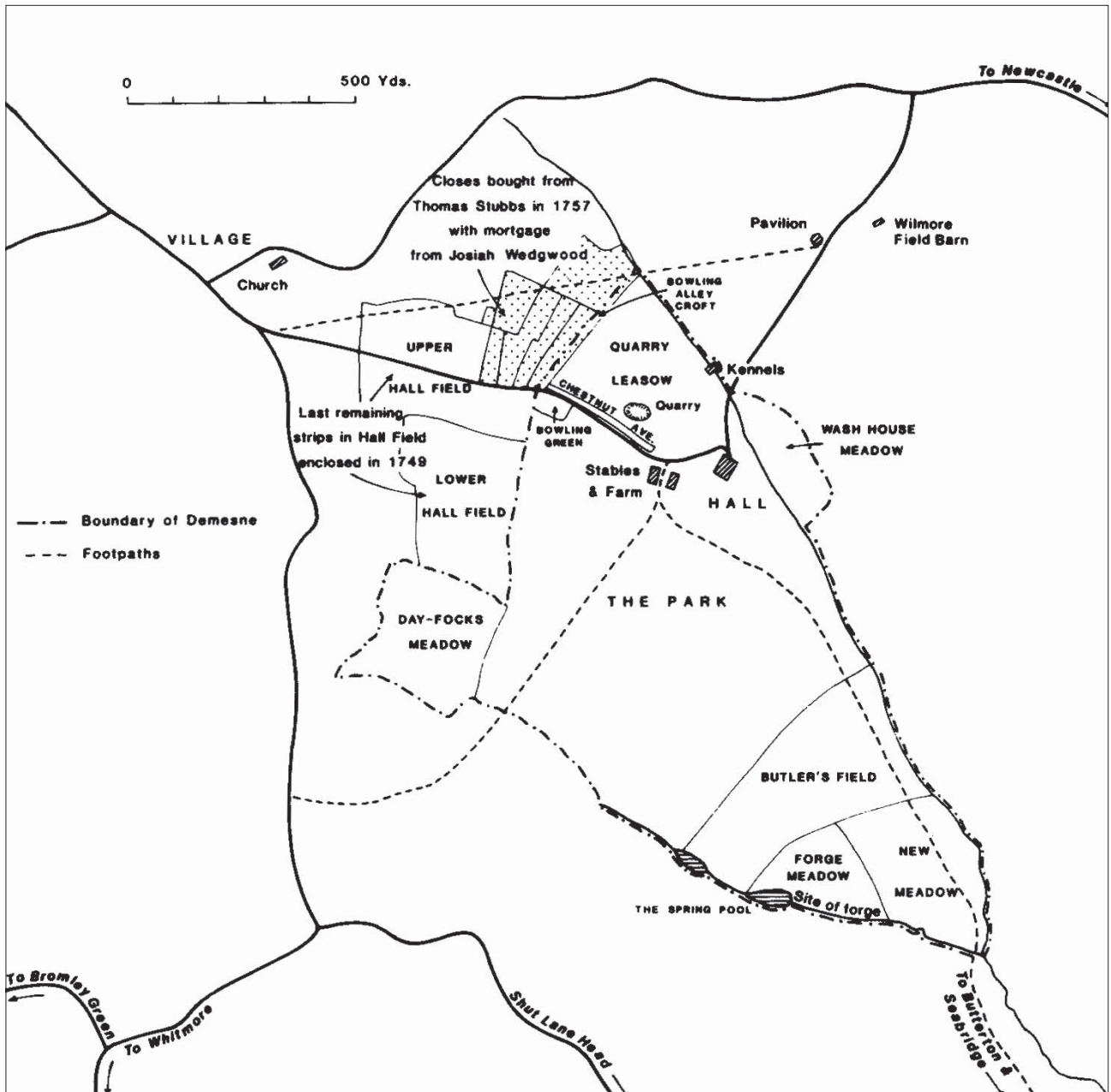


FIGURE 1. Tentative reconstruction of the Demesne about 1740.

directed the alterations themselves, gaining great satisfaction through their own personal involvement in the development of the estate.¹

A Genius for making Improvements

In 1741 Ralph Sneyd inherited the estate on the death of his brother Dryden. Ralph was to hold the estate for over fifty years and during this period he altered and partly rebuilt the Hall, established a walled garden and landscaped the park. This period of active development contrasts with the earlier years of the century when, because the estate had been managed for minors for long periods, the demesne lands had been leased out and even Keele Hall itself left unoccupied or let for some years.

Ralph inherited a house originally built about 1580 nearly a mile away from the village, on a south-facing site sheltered from the north and east by high ridges. In 1734 it had a park of 118 acres in a demesne which extended in total to 191 acres.² A stream ran across the estate from north-west to south-east through a series of fish ponds, including Quarry Leasow Pool, Dog Kennel Pool, Little House Pool, Garden Pool and Bath Pool. There were other ponds on the demesne including Spring Pool and Stable Pool. The ponds mostly held carp and tench, but Spring Pool contained trout as it does to-day (Fig. 1).³

One of the few developments that had taken place on the estate earlier in the century had been the building of a Pavilion in 1723 on the highest point of the estate (where the Observatory now stands). This was built in Windmill Field, beside what was then the main approach to Keele Hall from Newcastle.⁴ No good pictures of it survive, but it was conspicuous enough to be shown in small sketches on maps of the period. It was a two-storeyed hexagonal building with a pointed roof. Sometimes called a Summer House, it had a fireplace and must have given a clear view not only of the Keele estate but also of other Sneyd properties at Bradwell and Wolstanton and on the far side of the Potteries at Tunstall and Hulton. The Pavilion stood for just over 100 years.

When Ralph inherited he was only eighteen, still a student at Oriel College, Oxford and, perhaps, not yet interested in managing his estates. A letter to him from a college tutor, Edmund Bentham suggests other interests:

I presume that a letter from Oxford upon any occasion would be agreeable to you and much more one that can bring with it some authentick intelligence of your friend *Tray* who was pick'd up by the Cook's boy in the street as he was trotting onward after a Coach and four two days ago. As it is not known whether *Tray* was guilty of making a voluntary elopement, or was seduced by evil company, he is at present under a gentle confinement till a convenient opportunity shall offer itself for the conveying of him to you. ... For my part I don't see how the life of a young Gent. like yourself should be any other than one constant series of diversions and pleasures.⁵

Within ten years Edward Bentham had become a Doctor of Divinity, a Canon of Christ Church and Regius Professor of Divinity. Ralph's way of life had also changed, probably under pressure from his formidable grandmother. She had outlived four husbands, Ralph's grandfather, another Ralph Sneyd, Sir Charles Skrymsher of Norbury, Sir John Chester of Chicheley Hall and Charles Adderley of Hams Hall. Lady Chester (as she was usually called) dominated her family like an eighteenth-century Bess of Hardwick. Soon, Ralph was writing to her:

I assure you my eyes are opened and I now see with no small concern all my former extravagance, and the greatest pleasure I now have is the improvement of my estate.⁶

And again:

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

I have plow'd the lower end of the park and am carrying a ditch and quicksett hedge round the park. I have sent my hounds to their walks and find much more pleasure in improving my estate than in hunting or anything else. I have received fifty pounds from Blest Colclough since I came here, have paid my workmen, kept my house and do not owe a sixpence in the countrey.⁷

To add weight to his assurances, his lawyer, Blest Colclough also wrote to Lady Chester:

I was at Keele last week where I found Mr Sneyd very prudently employ'd in looking after his workmen mudding [dredging] the pool; he is up every morning Early and staying with them all day and avoids being harryed with company. The whole leisure he has is dispos'd of in riding about his grounds and Estate, and in admonishing his tenants when he sees anything amiss and acknowledges that in this way, he has received so much satisfaction that he prefers it to all others. If he continues thus, he will be a desirable young gentleman, happy in himself and all his friends happy with him.⁸

Perhaps Ralph felt that Lady Chester needed further convincing, for his uncle Edward Sneyd also wrote to her the following day:

I have been two or three days at Keel where my nephew is very busy cleaning a pool, a very necessary work. He seems to have a Genius for making Improvements, with discretion enough to keep it within bounds, and I don't know a place where there is more room to exercise it, or where it is more wanted than at Keel. Scarce any has greater natural Beauty's or is more capable of delightfull Improvements. You must therefore encourage him by lending him six or seven hundred pounds, and I dare say you will be very well pleas'd with his laying it out. Beginning so young he may with God's blessing have long enjoyment of the pleasures he makes himself there.⁹

Perhaps the reform of dog and Master was not as complete as Lady Chester was led to believe, for in 1749 Mr Bayle's man was given one shilling for bringing Tray home and ten shillings was paid for cocks to fight at Keele Hall.¹⁰

One change at this time opened the way to further improvements on the estate. This was the final disappearance of the open field system. Not much of the land in the parish was still held in this way and in 1749, by a complicated series of land exchanges, the final 80 acres were enclosed and Hall Field, Blast Field and Smithy Field disappeared.¹¹ A further step, equally significant, was the appointment of Thomas Breck as Steward in 1753. Breck was to serve Ralph Sneyd and his son for over 50 years. He lived at, and farmed on his own account, Penfields which lay three-quarters of a mile south-west of Keele Hall,. The motorway now runs across its site. Breck organised and superintended the land management and financial affairs of the estate with great skill. He kept meticulous accounts and day books and preserved both the letters he received and the drafts of his replies, so that there is a detailed picture of the running of the estate for these years.

From 1757 onwards extensive work was carried out on Keele Hall and the east end of the house was rebuilt. The work was carried out by William Baker of Audlem, but ideas and sketches for gothicising the building were provided by Sir Roger Newdigate, a close friend of the family who frequently visited Keele and had extensively gothicised his own house, Arbury Hall in Warwickshire.¹² By December 1762 work on the Hall was nearing completion and Baker turned his attention to the walled garden:

The shell of the East End shall be covered in before August and the garden and dove house going on at the same time may also be finish't in September, but this will depend greatly on weather and men, in the making of brick, nor must any time be lost in that affair. 350 thousand must be made

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

... The above work being done then the next winter will plant your garden walls and the spring and summer will stock your dove house.

The garden walls with stone coping, good wainscot doors well painted with locks, latches and hinges will cost £310 and the dove house well built with a hansom cupola and the inside with a circular ladder with door etc will be worth £50.¹³

The work went ahead quickly. Clay was dug, clamps were built and the bricks were burned on Wildmoor Field (now Home Farm) by John Barker.¹⁴ James Pepper was paid for levelling the foundation of the garden wall and Faithfull Pepper for laying the bricks.¹⁵ The labourers were first paid for working in the new made garden in 1764.¹⁶ The garden walls still stand, although the dove house vanished long ago, probably when the stables were rebuilt in 1833.



FIGURE 2. A Plan of the intended Improvements at KEEL the Seat of Ralph Sneyd Esq. by Win. Emes 1769

(1. The House & Offices; 2. The Stables & Farmyard; 3. Kitchen Garden & Orchard; 4. Approach to the House & Pleasure Garden; 5. The Dog Kennel; 6. Pavillion; 7. Ride round the Improvements; 8. Farm Houses made [?]; 9. The Spring Pool Ornamented).

Natural Landscaping

With the Hall refurbished and the walled garden completed, Ralph's attention turned to the park and he called in William Emes to landscape it. Although Fines's elegant 'Plan of the intended Improvements at Keel' is dated 1769 it is clear from the accounts that a considerable amount of work had been carried out the previous year (Fig. 2). "Altogether, for the three years for which the accounts survive, 1768-70, Fines was paid £215, and the work certainly continued beyond this period.¹⁸

Emes had been head gardener at Kedleston from 1756 to 1760 and had then launched out on a career as an independent landscape designer. He worked in a style similar to that of 'Capability' Brown but there is no evidence that he had been a pupil of Brown. By the time he was called in at Keele he had already developed an extensive practice in the region and had worked at Eaton and Tatton

in Cheshire, Chirk and Erddig in Denbighshire and Platt Hall in Lancashire. While he was at Keele he was simultaneously carrying out commissions at Tixall, Ingestre, Beaudesert and Oakedge in Staffordshire, Crewe and Oulton in Cheshire, Heaton in Lancashire and Powis in Montgomeryshire. Emes left his foremen John and Thomas Brunt and Birch in charge at Keele while he visited other clients.

Since this is the earliest surviving estate plan of Keele some care is needed in interpreting it, for it shows both existing features and proposed alterations without distinguishing between them. By building dams across the valley below the house he created a series of lakes whose gently sloping banks were open and grazed by cattle. On the further side of the valley from the Hall trees were planted singly and in clumps on the rising ground, while the ridge above carried a long plantation along the skyline. 'A ride round the improvements' was proposed, winding through this ridge-top plantation, giving views alternately to the north-east towards Newcastle and then to the south-west over the lake, past the Hall, across the park with more tree clumps and then in the distance to the Wrekin and the Welsh mountains.

Immediately below the windows of the house the ground was levelled to make a pleasure garden, separated from the park by a sunk fence or ha-ha. Shrubs were planted below the drawing room window, an unusual feature at this time when the grass lawns normally swept right up to the walls of the house.¹⁹

It is clear that the demesne lands were not to be taken out of agriculture, for the park is divided by fences and farm buildings are present, although concealed in trees. What Fines designed was a *ferme ornee*, combining profit with pleasure.

One of the most interesting features of the design is a pool towards the lower end of the park, shown thickly planted all round with trees and labelled 'The Spring Pool Ornamented'. This was the pool which for some fifty years had provided the power to drive a hammer forge. Plot, in 1686, had described how the iron was beaten out here into discs which were then taken to another forge in Newcastle to be shaped into frying pans. Now the forge no longer operated and Fines's plan shows one of the earliest examples in the country of the deliberate reclamation of a disused industrial site.

²⁰

By a rare chance it is possible to see Keele hall and its landscape just at the time Fines completed his work. In 1773 Josiah Wedgwood and his partner Bentley were commissioned by the Empress Catherine of Russia to provide a dinner and desert service of 952 pieces for the palace later known as La Grenouillere or Chesme.²¹ The service of Queen's ware was to carry hand-painted pictures of British views, castles, ruins, country houses and gardens. Many of the 1224 pictures were taken from published engravings (and Ralph Sneyd lent Wedgwood his subscriber's copy of Wilson's view of Wales²²), but for some, particularly those within easy reach of Etruria, Wedgwood commissioned the artist Edward Stringer of Knutsford to take views especially for the service. On 6 November 1773 Wedgwood wrote to Bentley: 'I do not know that I shall return in time to say any more today - am going to Keel and Swynnerton with Mr Stringer'.²³

Three pieces of the service carried views of Keele. A large dish cover has a view of the Hall from the south-west and shows smooth lawns sweeping up to the house together with curving gravel walks (Fig. 3). The topography is rather exaggerated and so too perhaps is the size of the newly planted trees. A comparison of the view with the engraving by Burghers, nearly 100 years earlier, shows that the main facade of the house is similar, although there are minor changes in windows and doors. The main change is the disappearance of the massive gate piers and garden wall from in front of the house. It is interesting that a view of Keele should appear on one of the more imposing pieces in the service,

for there was competition among landowners to have their houses and gardens depicted on such pieces and Wedgwood realised that he could, in this way, pay a compliment to his more influential patrons. A second piece in the service carries a section of the same view, while the third piece, which had a view of the pavilion, is unfortunately missing.²⁴

One of the most attractive features of the lakes in recent years has been the swans which have nested on an island, but there has been difficulty in keeping them. There were similar problems in the eighteenth century. In June 1749 three shillings was paid for a swan. One month later Mercer's girl was paid two pence for bringing the swans home and a month after that a man was paid for taking up and bringing the swans home.²⁵ In 1789 Vickers was paid 10s. 6d. for a pen swan, the other being dead and two years later Mr Tollett's coachman was paid 5s. 0d. for bringing a present of three swans, presumably from Betley.²⁶



FIGURE 3. A dish cover from the Green Frog dinner service supplied by Wedgwood and Bentley to Catherine the Great in 1774. This is View 618 from Bentley's catalogue "View at Keil, Staffordshire, Mr Sneyd's country seat." This shows the hall from the southwest, with the landscape recently laid out by William Emes. The pavilion can just be seen, on a hill to the right of the hall. (By courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, Leningrad.).

The Walled Garden

Plants to stock the new walled garden and the pleasure garden came from a number of sources. Some were transplanted from the old garden and in 1767 the gardener was paid 'for a job levelling where the old garden and foundations of old buildings were'²⁷ In 1768 two horse loads of garden seeds and fruits came from Edward Sneyd's garden at Alington, near Market Drayton, ten miles away.²⁸ Edward's garden was well-stocked and many receipts survive showing the varieties of fruit tree he had bought forty years earlier when making the garden.²⁹ In 1768 Ralph bought garden seeds and fruit trees from John Whittingham, a nurseryman of the Charterhouse in Coventry.³⁰ Whittingham's catalogue, dated 1764 in manuscript, survives and appears to be the earliest known priced catalogue.³¹ It has four pages and lists a wide variety of forest trees and flowering shrubs, 427 sorts in all. He

lists 44 named varieties of Rose and could supply 40 sorts of strip'd (variegated) Holly (Fig. 4). In 1775 problems arose over strawberry plants ordered from Hewitt and Smith, whose nursery was in Brompton Road, Kensington.³² William Smith wrote to Breck:

Your letter of 9th came here in due course, are sorry the waggoner was so stupidly careless in not bringing the strawberry plants. our man declares he deliver'd 'em at the very instant he was loading his waggon in London. have sent the same quantity, with 100 Gooseberry Bush's by Davenport's Newcastle waggon yesterday, did not send them by Haywood for fear the like should happen again. Can get no tidings of those you sent back suppose they are lost.³³

In 1781 garden trees and shrubs were bought from Brunton and Forbes of 25 High Street, Birmingham and in 1778 Messrs Gordon and Co. of Fenchurch Street, London were paid £13 7s. 0d. for seeds.³⁴ Not all plants came from such distant nurseries. In 1778 two dozen raspberry plants were bought from 'a Traveller' for ls. 6d. A frequent purchase was of dwarf Box 'for edging of Borders in the Garden'.³⁶

Ralph had a succession of gardeners, but none of them stayed long. Between 1767 and 1793 seven different gardeners are named in the accounts, each assisted by a number of labourers. The gardener's wages ranged from £14 per year for Richard Keen in 1770 to £20 per year for Richard Wyatt in 1790-93. In the latter year the labourers' work in the garden cost £68 9s. 9d. Perhaps Ralph did not have confidence in his gardeners, for in 1783 Mr Wedgwood's gardener was paid for pruning vines.³⁷

Although the walled garden faces south-west, is well sheltered from the north and the east and has high walls, the Keele climate is not mild and from an early date plants were being grown with the aid of heat. In 1770 hot beds were made using bark from the tannery in Newcastle and 'Sparagus' was grown on them.³⁸ Later Mr Mellard of Newcastle supplied seven loads of tan for the melon house and melon plants were fetched from Crewe (presumably Crewe Hall).³⁹ There was a heated vine house and a hot wall on which peaches were grown.⁴⁰ The standard of cultivation improved and the range of plants grown increased during the last twenty-five years of Ralph's life. It is perhaps a sign of this that in 1790 Breck wrote to William Cox, Wedgwood's clerk at Etruria: 'Mrs Sneyd desires that you will send to Keele the first opportunity some 100 earthenware numbers to stick in Flower Potts beginning with 1 and to 100 in a progressive order.'⁴¹

Oranges and Lemons

Ralph Sneyd died in December 1793 and was succeeded by his eldest son, Walter who was an officer in the Staffordshire Militia. Six months before his father's death he had been promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and appointed second in command when the militia was mobilised after a ten year lapse, in response to the war with France. This meant that Walter would be away from Keele for long periods for the next few years, as the regiment was stationed at Windsor on Royal Duties.⁴² Walter had to direct improvements at Keele through letters to Breck, although he warned him:

You must not be affronted at my taking the management of my farm into my own hands (I mean when I can be constantly resident on it) Because it is to be my amusement as well as my employment and the living any when in absolute Idleness is what I cannot do.⁴³

The earliest letters between Colonel Walter and Breck are largely concerned with agricultural affairs, draining fields, repairing stone walls and cultivating the arable land. But Walter was also concerned with the appearance of the estate:

I should also like to have some of the Beech trees out the Plantation (such as I described to the Gardener) to be dotted about the Pavilion field - and believe this is the proper time of the year for

doing it.⁴⁴

The lakes were mudded (dredged) and the mud spread over the park and dressed with lime before being ploughed in.⁴³ By 1798 attention was turning to the pleasure grounds and the walled garden. Breck reported:

Joseph the waller has nearly finished the repairs of the Sunk Fence below the Pleasure Ground - he makes a substantial good fence of it but according to custom leaves it frequently for a week

A
C A T A L O G U E
O F
Forest Trees, Fruit Trees, Flowering
Shrubs, and Evergreens, 1764
Propagated for SALE by JOHN WHITTINGHAM,
Nurferyman and Seedfman, at the Charter-house, near Coventry.

	Each	Each	
	s. d.	s. d.	
ENGLISH Elms, 7 Feet high	0 6	American Red Spruce	1 0
Ditto 8 and 9 Feet	0 8	American White Spruce	1 0
Ditto 10 Feet	0 10	American Black Spruce, 2 Feet	1 0
Ditto 11 & 12 Feet	1 0	Ditto 3 and 4 Feet	1 6
Silver strip'd Elms	1 0	Ditto 5 and 6 Feet	2 0
Ditto 10 Feet	2 0	Hemlock Spruce	2 0
Gold strip'd Elms		Balm of Gilead Fir, 1 1/2 Foot	2 0
Strip'd Witch Elms		Ditto 2 Feet	2 6
Oaks 1 Foot high	0 1	Ditto 3 Feet	3 0
Ditto 2 Feet	0 2	Silver Fir, 1 Foot	0 3
Ditto 3 Feet	0 3	Ditto 2 and 3 Feet	0 6
Ditto 4 Feet	0 4	Ditto 6 and 7 Feet	1 0
Larch 3 Feet	0 3	Ditto 8 and 10 Feet	2 0
Ditto 6 Feet	0 6	Ditto with strip'd Leaves	2 0
Ditto 8 Feet	0 8	Scotch Pine, commonly call'd Scotch Fir, 1 Ft.	0 5
Ditto 10 Feet	1 0	Ditto 2 Feet	0 5
Beech 3 and 4 Feet	0 3	Ditto 3 Feet	0 6
Ditto 6 and 7 Feet	0 6	Ditto 4 Feet	0 6
Ditto 8 and 9 Feet	0 9	Larger Sizes, if required, to	2 0
Ditto 10 and 11 Feet	1 0	Glulifer Pines	1 0
Hornbeam, 4 and 5 Feet high	0 5	Jersey Pines	1 0
Ditto 10 and 12 Feet	1 0	Stone Pines	1 0
Hedge Chestnuts, 5 and 6 Feet	0 4	Wilton Pine	1 0
Ditto 7 Feet	0 6	Weymouth Pine, 1 Foot high	1 0
Ditto 9 and 10 Feet	1 0	Ditto 2 Feet	1 0
Spanish Chestnuts, 3 Feet	0 3	Ditto 3 Feet	1 6
Ditto 6 and 7 Feet	0 6	Ditto 4 Feet	2 0
Ditto 10 and 12 Feet	1 0	Ditto with Sable-Green Leaves	2 0
Limes, 3 and 4 Feet high	0 3	Yew Trees, 2 Feet	0 6
Ditto 7 and 8 Feet	0 6	Ditto 3 and 4 Feet	1 0
Ditto 10 and 12 Feet	1 0	Gold strip'd Yew	2 0
Walnuts, 10 and 12 Feet	1 0	Green Hollies, 6 Inches high,	per 100 2 0
Black American Ditto	1 0	Ditto 1 Foot	per 100 4 0
White American Ditto	1 0		
Sycamores, 8 and 9 Feet	0 6	Peaches, Standards	2 0
Ditto 10 and 12 Feet	0 9	Ditto, Dwarfs	1 0
Oriental Planes, 6 Feet high	0 6	Charterhouse Peach	2 0
Ditto 7 and 8 Feet	0 9	Nectarines, Standards	2 0
Ditto 10 Feet	1 0	Ditto, Dwarfs	1 0
Ditto 12 Feet	1 6	Apricots, Standards	2 0
Ditto 14 Feet	2 0	Ditto, Dwarfs	1 0
Occidental Planes, 6 Feet	0 6	Plums, Standards	1 0
Ditto 8 Feet	0 9	Ditto, Dwarfs	0 9
Ditto 10 and 12 Feet	1 0	Cherries, Standards	1 0
Spanish Planes	1 0	Ditto, Dwarfs	0 9
Western Planes from America	1 0	Apples, Standards	1 0
Hickory Nut	1 0	Ditto, Dwarfs on Crablocks	0 6
Thin-shell'd Ditto	1 0	Ditto, Dwarfs on Paradise	1 0
Quickbeam, or Wild Service	0 3	Pears, Standards	1 0
Ditto 7 and 8 Feet	0 6	Ditto, Dwarfs	1 0
Ditto 10 and 12 Feet	1 0	Figs, from 6 d. to	1 0
White Beam Tree, 3 and 4 Feet	0 6	Dutch Medlars, Standards	1 0
Ditto 7 and 8 Feet	0 9	Ditto Dwarfs	0 9
Ditto 10 Feet	1 0	Quince, Standards	1 0
Maple-leaf'd Service	1 0	Ditto, Dwarfs	0 9
Red Spruce Firs, 1 Foot	0 2	White Filberts	0 5
Ditto 2 Feet	0 3	Scarlet Filberts	0 5
Ditto 3 Feet	0 4	Thin-shell'd large Spanish Nuts	0 6
Ditto 4 Feet	0 6	Black Mulberries, from 4 d. to	5 0
Ditto 5 and 6 Feet	0 8	White Mulberries	1 0
Ditto 7 and 8 Feet	0 10	Gooseberries, many Sorts, at	0 3
Ditto 9 and 10 Feet	1 0	Currans	0 3

N. B. I insure the Growth of all Sorts of Trees, at Twopence Advance in the Shilling above my printed Price, providing my Directions for Planting are followed.

FIGURE 4. The first page of John Whittingham's 4-page catalogue, dated, in manuscript, 1764. Ralph Sneyd paid £2 19s. for garden seed and fruit trees from Whittingham in 1768, (By courtesy of Mr W. Bedson).

together to secure other work. ⁴⁶

In the same year a new greenhouse was built:

The Green House sashes are to be fitted and glazed next week and I hope you will like the appearance of it at the end of the Walk, indeed if you do not think it too far from the House a better situation could not be found. ⁴⁷

There was soon to be an opportunity of filling the new greenhouse, for Walter heard that Mrs D' Avenant of the Grove, Market Drayton had some orange trees for sale and he wrote to Breck:

Tho I think it is rather extravagant, I am nevertheless determined to purchase the orange trees from Drayton - I therefore wish you would let the gardener go over there again and, in short, to make as good a bargain as he can, but not let them slip thro' his fingers - It is an opportunity never likely to offer again and a few pounds is not a consideration for a thing that I think will give Mrs Sneyd so much satisfaction. ⁴⁸

Breck told him that there was some tough bargaining, but that Mrs D' Avenant agreed to sell the seven orange trees for 25 guineas

and promises to take the same care of them as before we can send for them, which will be the first day that is likely to suit them, - I understand she was so much displeased with the gardener for undervaluing them that I was afraid she would not let him have them at any price. ⁴⁹

The greenhouse had to be completed quickly to receive them, the stage altered to take the trees and painted and the floor flagged. Walter was very concerned that, having been bought, they should now be properly packed and transported to Keele on a mild day. ⁵⁰ Breck was able to reassure him:

We got the trees safe in the Green House without any damage on Thursday last; and Mrs D' Avenant was very desirous they should be carried safe, said she thought there could not be room for them in one wagon and, if not, directed they would hire another in Dreighton and she would pay for it. She stood by to see them loaded, sends her comp'ts and hoped they would give Mrs. S. satisfaction. ⁵¹

Two weeks later Breck was able to write 'the Orange and Lemon trees are in good health, look very well in the house.'⁵²

The kitchen garden was being intensively cultivated at this time. From 1794 onwards most seeds and plants were bought from the Knutsford Nursery owned by John Nickson and John Carr, and after 1796 by William Caldwell and Carr.⁵³ The order books of the nursery give detailed lists of the seeds and plants sent to Keele from 1794 to 1822. ⁵⁴ In 1794, 66 varieties of vegetable seeds were bought. The range is impressive. There were seven varieties of garden pea alone: Single early frame, Early Hotspur, Dwarf Marrow, Early Charlton, Large Marrow, Green non parreil and Spanish dwarf marrow. There were six varieties of bean, five of kidney bean, six of cabbage, three of collyflowere, savoy, borecole, brocoly (both purple and white), brussel sprouts, red and white beet, parsnip, scorzonera, salcify, Italian celery, five varieties of lettuce, two of endive, two of spinach, mustard, cress, two sorts of radish, two of carrot, four of turnep, four of onion, leeks, parsley, charvil, asparagus and early dwarf potatoes. In addition 76 sorts of annual flower seeds were bought, together with Double Roman and Luna Narcissus, a Red Magdalen peach, a Newington nectarine and twelve each of four varieties of rose - Red Monthly, Common Province, Moss and Blush Cluster. For this entire collection Walter paid £10 3s. 1d. In subsequent years similar collections of vegetables and flower seeds were bought, but with larger numbers of fruit trees and flowering trees and shrubs. The most expensive plant was

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

Rhododendron ponticum, two of which were purchased in 1797 for 4s. 0d. each. This plant had only been introduced into commerce in 1770 and was not yet common.⁵⁵ Perhaps these two shrubs were the ancestors of the many which were to colonise the woodlands in later years.

In 1810 Walter bought a greenhouse from John Wedgwood of Etruria Hall. John, Josiah's eldest son, was a keen gardener, the founder of what later became the Royal Horticultural Society and its first treasurer.⁵⁶ However, in 1809 he resigned from the Society and the following year left Etruria for London.⁵⁷ His household goods, plants and garden fittings were advertised for sale:

.... Grape House and Green House with cast iron rafters, bearers and columns, melon and cucumber frames, garden engine and hand glasses, and a very superior collection of greenhouse plants, curious heaths and rare exotics ... many of which are seedlings raised from seeds recently procured by Mr Wedgwood from the Cape of Good Hope at a very considerable expense: and may probably be such as have not been heretofore known in this kingdom.⁵⁸

Walter Sneyd's men dismantled the greenhouse to take it to Keele. Although he had also bought the steam boiler to heat it, Walter had reservations about using it. As he wrote to Wedgwood: 'I do not believe my Gardener would exactly understand it in which case it might do more harm than good.'⁵⁹



FIGURE 5 Keele from the Pavilion Hill. A sketch by Archdeacon John Gooch, who married Barbara, sister of Col. Walter Sneyd in 1791. It shows Emes's landscape maturing, with smooth grassy banks to the lake and clumps of trees scattered in the park. The conical profile of the Wrekin can be seen on the skyline to the right of Keele Hall. In the foreground, the entrance drive from Newcastle drops down steeply from Pavilion Hill.

Although during this period most attention was focussed on the walled garden, the parkland was not neglected. Minor alterations were made to the lakes designed thirty years earlier by Fines. The Garden pool was narrowed, the dam altered and one corner cut off the pool below (Fig. 5). The purpose was to make the lower pool more visible from the house and to give the appearance of a serpentine river.⁶⁰ It was a wet year and Breck wrote later of uncommon rain and Land-Floods:

all your pools flowed over the Damins in the greatest Torrents I ever remember which took out so many Fish we had the men employ'd in collecting them out of the Brooks below all day Sunday.
61

But Breck was able to send Col. Walter a good account of the grounds:

You have great plenty of garden things, a very full crop of grapes some of which are ripe but the Gardiner says they will keep till you come. The Cherries tho' they were very full of Bloom are but few and those unkindly. The new planted Yews and Laurels before the wet sett in were very unpromising but I think most of them especially the latter will recover. The Roses are very full of Buds and are beginning to blow tho' at present not very promising to be healthful. The new Plantations have made great shoots and the Forest Trees have a beautiful foliage which I think are now safe from any blight (Fig.6).⁶²



FIGURE 6. This sketch, dated 1828, shows the southeast front of Keele Hall from the lake. The lawn within the ha-ha has a number of circular flower beds and shrubs scattered across it in gardenesque style. The year after this sketch was made Ralph succeeded his father and launched his extensive landscaping campaign.

In 1814 two public footpaths which crossed the estate were diverted. Previously they had run close to Keele Hall. The new routes took them further away from the Hall. Later diversions, in 1834 and 1840, took this process even further, so that no public rights of way ran anywhere within sight of the Hall. This allowed the routes of the drives from Newcastle and Keele village to the Hall, which previously had followed the public rights of way, to be varied, giving more attractive approaches with gentler gradients (Fig. 7).⁶³

The Picturesque Gentleman

Colonel Walter Sneyd died in June 1829 and was succeeded by his son Ralph who immediately launched an extensive landscaping campaign that was to continue for many years. Within three

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

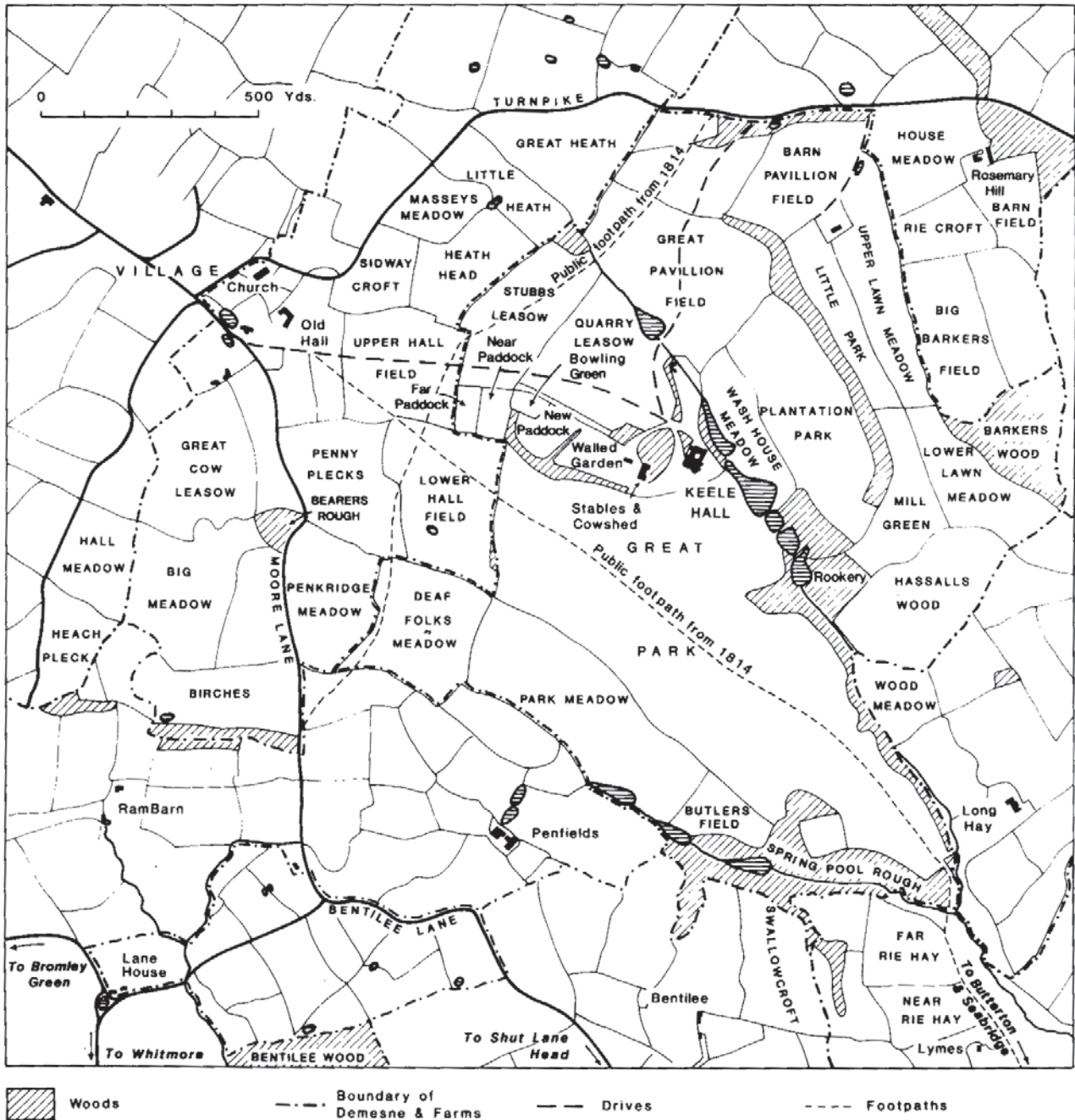


FIGURE 7 The Demesne and adjacent farms in 1829.

months of his father's death he was writing to a friend:

It is just about that time that Gilpin is to come to me to direct certain plantings and etc. which I wish to lose no time in executing and I must not on any account miss his visit. ⁶⁴

William Sawrey Gilpin (nephew of the Rev.W.Gilpin, author of various tours in search of the Picturesque) had set up as a landscape designer in the 1820s and wrote *Practical Hints upon Landscape Gardening* in 1832. He favoured the picturesque principles of Sir Uvedale Price rather than the traditions of Brown and Fines and so tried to create roughness, irregularity and sudden variation in the landscape together with the planting of a wide variety of trees, including some of the conifers newly introduced from North America. By this time extensive landscaping was becoming unfashionable because it took land out of agricultural production, but Ralph had been born in 1793

and, at heart, belonged to the eighteenth century as the following extract reveals. ⁶⁵

I have a solicitor and a landscape gardiner in the house with me and between them every moment of my time is occupied. The former makes the most tantalising discoveries of the Manors and estates wherof my family was seised before the Usurpation and which, if unfortunately they had not been sold and confiscated, might have enabled me to glut the ravenous maw of my Picturesque Gentleman with the scores of fat acres which he has sentenced *to the Plantations*. As it is I am ruined and my bailiff will scarcely survive the last enclosure of Pastures which it seems are quite necessary to ‘mass with the distance’ - ‘break the boundary’ (and the Proprietor). When I am dead it will be a beautiful thing - What more can one reasonably desire? ⁶⁶

Gilpin continued to advise on landscaping for several years. In 1832 he was unable to make his way to Keele from Nuneham Courtney in Oxfordshire because an attack of gout had forced him to return home, however, within a month he was at Keele again. ⁶⁷

Gilpin, my man of taste is with me. He is so *very flattering* about all I have done de mon chef that he has almost persuaded me my taste is as good as his - and it is certainly cheaper... he is an amiable, quiet, gentleman-like man. ⁶⁸

As this suggests, Ralph himself took an active part in the landscaping.

[I am] still preparing to plant like Bathurst and to build like Boyle - watching workmen - marking trees - and carting stakes a la Gilpin. ⁶⁹

As Ralph moved round the country, from one house party to the next, he studied the views and gardens he saw.

I returned from Wales on Monday - I did nothing but ride after the picturesque all day long ... and have brought back such magnificent landscapes engraved on the retina of my eye that my own looks flat and insipid and puts me out of humour. ⁷⁰

[Boconnoc, Cornwall] is a great scale of a place with fine bold varieties of ground - deep vallies - sweeping woods and bright gushing streams -and has more of the Characteristics of a mountain country than the round-headed Cornish hills seem to entitle it to - Then the wide brown barren moors offer a ‘potentiality’ of planting beyond the dreams of any Gilpin or Repton - George [Fortescue] has very good taste and likes to exercise it, so he has an occupation as well as a residence. I always imagine (I suppose because one is sure to want what one has not) that I prefer that vast elbow room of poor land in countries of Down and Moor to the contracted space to which its value restricts a moderate Estate in these Midland latitudes. I should feel more self-respect if I could say - Plant me that range of hills - than I do when I ask my bailiff’s leave to cut off the corner of a field - however, corners though they be, they engross me and I am just come back in time to stick them full of oaks. ⁷¹

Ralph was occupied with tree planting from the time he inherited the estate and it dominated the first stage of his campaign. It was during this period that much of the present woodland on the estate was planted. The lakes, which in the eighteenth century had an open setting, with gentle grassy banks, now had trees planted thickly along most of their margins. A group of beech trees was planted on a knoll half a mile south of the Hall. To make it a more conspicuous feature in the middle distance, the knoll was raised artificially in height by building a rough stone embankment on its further side, above the Spring Pool. The last of these beeches were felled in 1985 as they were unsafe. Ralph not

only planted a hundred thousand young trees in 1830, he also transplanted mature trees, following the guidance of Sir Henry Stewart's *The Planter's Guide*.

Last autumn many more trees which had attained the years of discretion and some which had attained much more pretty dimensions were danced about in various directions - and all apparently with complete success.⁷²

Having fortified my plantations of forest trees - I have just open'd my campaign with evergreens - and I am stationing Cedars of Lebanon and counterinarching detachments of Hollies - platooning Yews - and, like Caesar, covering my bald places with laurel. I have an infinity to do and I have no chance of being in town till late in next month.⁷³

Ralph was appreciated in country-house and London society and his friends began to complain that he was so engrossed in his 'grubberies and shrubberies' that they saw little of him.⁷⁴ But he was not to be diverted.

I see no prospect of emerging from my sylvan into your social world - as soon as I have done with Dryads, I pass to Naiads which I presume inhabit my pools, or if they do not now they certainly will when I have alter'd their shapes and puddled them⁷⁵

I read none [books] except those that treat of trenching ground, fencing off plantations and nursing young trees.⁷⁶

I am generally out eight hours of every day planning improvements, shaping grounds and plantations etc. - trifles and on a trifling scale, but sufficient to occupy and interest me.⁷⁷

In 1831, with his tree planting well under way, Ralph turned his attention to the lakes. He was determined to create one large lake out of the two which lay at the foot of the slope below the Hall. The soil that was dug out was thrown up on the far side to make a 'mountain' which was then planted with conifers and other trees

Now I am pulling down my pool - The expression sounds uncouth - but it is strictly accurate - Do you remember that the Principal Pool, shaped like a Painter's Palette had been elevated by the too partial hand of Nature - or rather, of Kent, which is quite another thing - some eight feet above the level of its neighbour? Well, after pondering and doubting and drawing and consulting as one does before embarking on a desperate enterprise, I buckled on my armour and resolved that I'd be damned if the pool should be dammed any longer and I have now had forty men for a month picking and boring and digging - and pick and bore and dig they must till they bring the two waters to the same level - I shall be ruined - but what matters that - I shall only be the less worth despoiling in the Revolution.⁷⁸

With the lakes enlarged he started building up the rockwork: 'I am building a *Viaduct* - erecting a high rugged rock nigh perpendicular'. ~ This, too, was probably under the direction of Gilpin, for it is in his style. On the bank of the newly enlarged lake, on the side away from the Hall and in full view of it, rocky crags were built up which once had a trickle of water splashing down them. The rock used is local Keele sandstone, but the crags have been built up artificially, held together with iron clamps (Fig. 8). There is another crag, probably the 'nigh perpendicular' one, close to the west corner of Keele Hall. A deep gorge was cut leading from the Hall to the stables, which were built, on the site of the earlier stables and farmyard, to designs by Edward Blore in 1833-4. There were problems in cutting this picturesque gorge for not all the rock was hard. There were 'marl faults' which had to be cut out and filled with rock from elsewhere. There were also labour troubles, as the agent Peake



FIGURE 8. Keele Hall by Edward Thomas c. 1835. The same view as in Figure 6, but seven years later. Ralph Sneyd has thrown the two lakes into one, picturesque crags have been built up in the foreground, and a viaduct built across the head of the lake. The soil excavated from the upper lake has been thrown up in a 'mountain' on the right hand bank and trees planted on it (By courtesy of the William Salt Library).

reported:

from tonight, all the stone-mason's work will be suspended, Mr Smith having received notice from the Unions that if he does not advance *each man* two shillings per week from this evening, they shall *strike* at Keele, Tittensor, Lilleshall, Instock and Eaton, in all about 150 men. Smith is gone to Lilleshall and the other places to dismiss them, and I have directed Robert Henshaw to suspend all further operations at Keel. We must never submit to be dictated to by a committee held at Hanley in the Staffordshire Potteries what shall be done at Keel.⁸⁰

The 'strike' seems not to have stopped the work for long. The stone viaduct across the head of the main lake was built at this time and probably the similar viaduct across the entrance to the old quarry in the woodland behind the present site of the University Library. It is likely that the stone for the Elizabethan Keele Hall had been cut from this quarry and although some more stone was cut from it in 1833 it was probably abandoned soon afterwards and made picturesque, with the viaduct carrying a path which led in one direction to a curved tunnel linking two sections of the quarry and in the other direction to steps leading up and out of it and connecting with a network of gravel paths through the woods.

The farm buildings had to be demolished in 1833 to make way for the new stables. The Home Farm was built to take their place, complete with a house for the Bailiff, in Wilinore Field where previously

there had only been a field barn.⁸¹ This meant that the cow sheds which previously had been only 200 yards from the Hall and almost within sight of the drawing room windows, were now nearly half a mile away and on the far side of Pavilion Hill.

Ralph also concerned himself with the approaches to the estate, moving not only private roads within the park but also the public roads outside.

From the bottom of the last ascent between Newcastle and my gate I have thrown the turnpike road about a hundred or 150 yards more to the right, thus taking it round instead of over the hill and leaving the whole of the left bank for plantations. This will be fenced by a wall of rough masonry and I am building a lodge of my own designing - which I intend should be pretty - uncommon and in good keeping with the house.⁸²

The entrance lodge may have been based on ideas provided by Ralph, but they were given architectural form by Mr Trubshaw, one of a family of architects from Rugeley.⁸³ At the same time the line of the entrance drive inside the park was altered to improve the approach to the house itself.⁸⁴ Ralph also built a lodge (now Drive Lodge) on the drive from the village in 1833. This lodge was then at the entrance to the park, because the present grass triangle, opposite the church, was still occupied by Old Hall Farm.

As well as improving the two existing drives to the Hall, Ralph planned a new and impressive approach from the south, through the new stable courtyard. He began in 1832 by planting an avenue of Sweet Chestnuts from the stables 200 yards down to the then existing public right of way from Keele to Butterton which had run across the park since 1814. In 1837 a new right of way was surveyed although it was not opened, as Lymes Road, until 1840.⁸⁵ This was nearly half a mile below the stables and thus even further from the Hall. The intention was obvious; to keep the public out of the park. He extended the avenue as a drive to meet the new road, and for 300 yards beyond it. Lymes Lodge was built in 1845 at the junction between the drive and Lymes Road.⁸⁶ Ralph's object in making the new entrance was clear:

... to effecting the first of all my desiderata to my place, a road from Trentham which will avoid that foul smithy Newcastle and bring me 2 miles nearer to the South and which will be moreover the prettiest approach imaginable.⁸⁷

There was also perhaps a more practical reason for this attempt to make the main entrance from the south. In 1837 the Grand Junction Railway was opened from Warrington to Birmingham and soon formed part of the main line system from London to the North-West. The station at Whitmore was only three miles from Keele and the new entrance provided the shortest and most attractive route from the Hall to the station. Although Stoke station on the North Staffordshire Railway opened in 1848, Whitmore was still recommended for many years as the station for visitors to Keele.⁸⁸

In 1842 Ralph Sneyd called in William Andrews Nesfield, one of the most successful landscape designers of the mid-nineteenth century. Nesfield prepared plans for the planting of an arboretum on the ridge near the old quarry (between the present-day Harrowby House and the Geology Department).⁸⁹ It is not clear whether, in fact, the arboretum was planted, for, apart from a Lucombe oak and fern-leaved beech, there are no unusual trees in this area today and none of the detailed descriptions of the grounds in gardening periodicals later in the nineteenth century mention it. On the other hand, it is probable that Nesfield's proposals for alterations to the Bowling Green (where Sneyd House now stands) were carried out, as late nineteenth-century photographs of this area do show an Italianate garden in his style. Nesfield also advised about changes around Keele Hall. Ralph noted:

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

I cannot write at any length, for I have Nesfield here for a very few hours, at a great many guineas an hour - and I am deeply engaged in the management of the very unmanageable ground in front of my house - and I am wilful and like my own way. ⁹⁰

Nesfield recommended that a terrace should be formed on the south-east front of the hall, overlooking the lake and it is probable that the present terrace, with segmental stone seats surmounted by urns at either end, was designed by him, although it is astonishing that it survived the rebuilding of the hall a few years later. ⁹¹ Nesfield also suggested 'making the most of the south-west front in a botanical sense', and although the present sunken parterre and fountain in this position are in his style, there is no other evidence to show whether this layout dates from this period, or whether it was created after the rebuilding of the hall.

Nesfield's charges are spelled out in a printed sheet he issued for the interest of prospective clients.

In consequence of Mr Nesfield being frequently requested to explain his Terms for professional services in Landscape Gardening he deems it expedient to state them in detail thus

For personal attendance a Visit 5 Guineas per diem

For Time on a journey 5 G's per Diem exclusive of travelling expenses

For ground Plans, Sections, Reports, Working Drawings, Tracings, Landscape or other sketches to illustrate proposed Improvements, and special appointments in London for conferences according to the Time occupied at the rate of 5 G's per Diem.

In some cases it is necessary by way of avoiding a prolonged visit on the part of Mr Nesfield to take with him or send his Assistant to survey, take Levels, transfer Designs to Ground or Instruct Gardeners or Clerks of Works in carrying out proposed operations, for which the charge is One Guinea per Diem, exclusive of travelling expenses by second class and also his Time on a Journey. ⁹²

In 1847 the turnpike road through Keele village was rerouted to ease its gradient and remove sharp bends. This brought it round the south and west sides of the church, where it was sunk in a shallow cutting.⁹³ The opportunity was taken to demolish Old Hall Farm, adding some of its land to the park and extending the drive by 300 yards to a new entrance lodge close to the centre of the village.

Andrew Thompson, the new and very active agent appointed in 1848 was responsible for the other changes in the years that followed. Penfields, Long Hay and Rosemary Hill farmhouses were demolished, their sites planted with trees and much of their land added to the park and Home Farm. ⁹⁴ In 1850 Richard Armstrong, an architect from London, designed an ice house which was built under the east end of the terrace by Keele Hall, just above the lake. ⁹⁵ This remained until Horwood Refectory was extended in the 1960s.

By 1855 the setting for Keele Hall was complete, with lakes, plantations, parkland, stables, drives and lodges, but the house itself was hardly worthy of this setting. Built nearly 300 years earlier, partially rebuilt and altered at various times since then, it was in poor condition and did not meet mid-Victorian standards of convenience, comfort or style.

In 1855, as work started on demolishing the old Hall, Ralph wrote:

I have now so developed the Place, that a House more in correspondence with it has become a positive want in my picture. I have for 24 years made it my chief amusement to work at this picture, and to leave it incomplete in so essential an item is flatly impossible. ⁹⁶

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

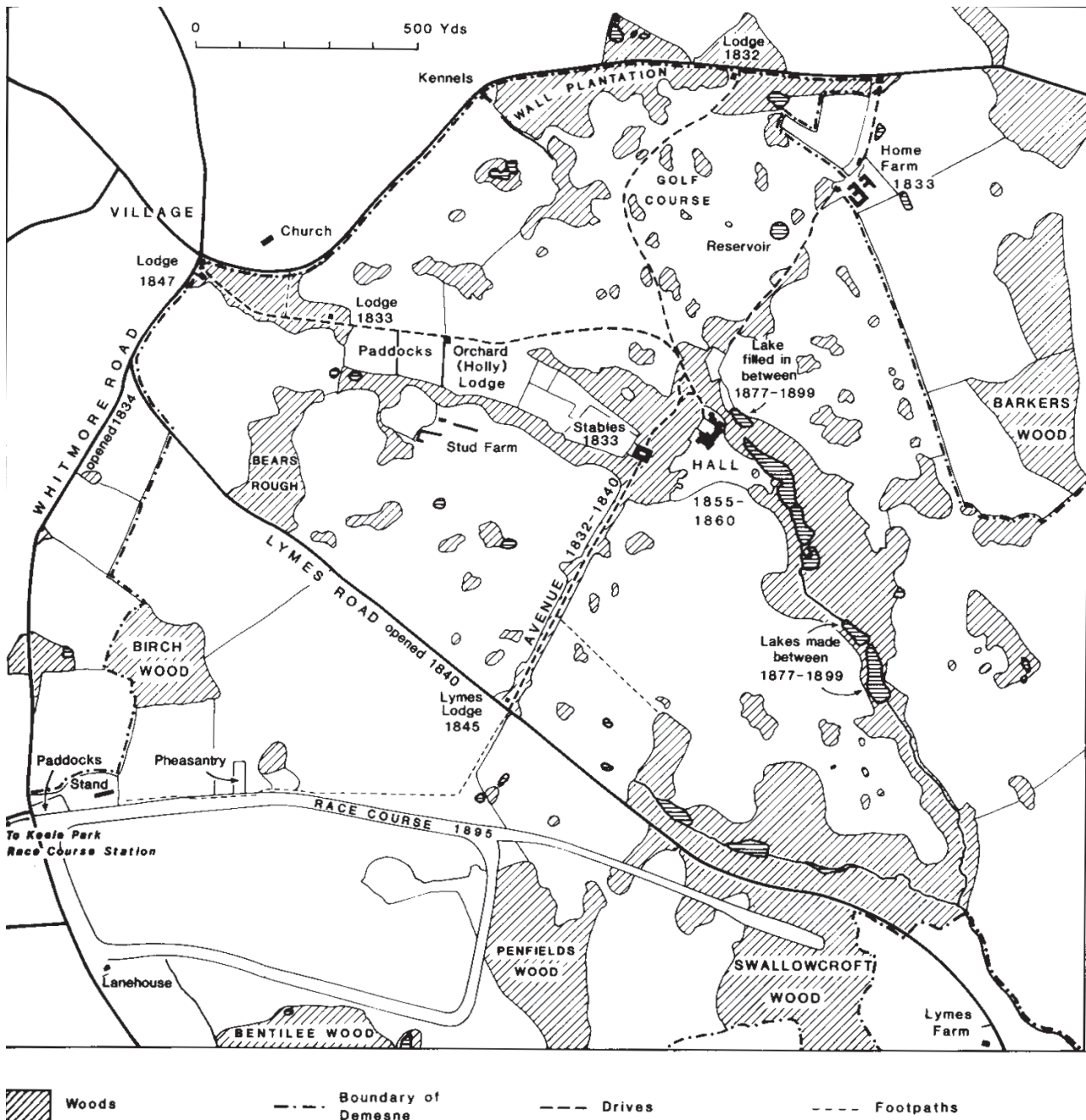


FIGURE 9. Keele Park in 1870, with alterations made to it up to 1900.

He employed Anthony Salvin as architect, and just as Ralph had played an active part in the landscaping, so he insisted on making major changes to Salvin's plans. It is also characteristic of Ralph that the new Hall was built on the site of the old and bore a marked resemblance to it, although it was larger. In both his building and his landscaping Ralph preferred old styles to new ones. In his letters he writes frequently and enthusiastically about his woods and lakes, like an eighteenth-century landowner. He rarely mentions with approval the mid-nineteenth century style, with its parterres and bedding-out. In 1856 he observed: 'I am not very fond of Heraldry among the Flowerbeds ... I shall expect to see the Gardener in a Tabard (Fig. 9).'⁹⁷

High Victorian Horticulture

In 1850 William Hill was appointed head gardener, on the recommendation of George Fleming, the



FIGURE 10. The head gardener and his family in front of their house, at the north corner of the stable courtyard. This now forms part of the music department. The head gardener's wife tended their own garden and grew a particularly fine variety of Verbena.

famous head gardener at Trentham Hall, the Staffordshire home of the Sutherlands. Although Hill was only 26 he had already worked at Bedgebury Park (Kent), Kenwood, the Horticultural Society's garden at Chiswick and Nuneham Park (Oxfordshire) as well as at Trentham, so he had wide experience.⁹⁶ During the 28 years he was head gardener at Keele the walled gardens and pleasure grounds were developed and maintained to such a high standard that they were well known in horticultural circles and were described in detail in gardening periodicals on a number of occasions.⁹⁹

When Ralph Sneyd first employed Hill, he told him: 'I am particularly anxious to have good Grapes, as they are the only fruit I eat.' Hill provided him with grapes all round the year. By 1872 there were ten vineries in which were grown fifteen varieties of grapes. Hill also became a very successful exhibitor at the shows held in London by the Royal Horticultural Society, the Royal Botanical Society and the Crystal Palace Company. In the ten years from 1853 he won, at these shows, 61 first prizes, 26 second prizes and 21 third prizes for grapes.¹⁰⁰

By 1856 a second walled garden, the upper, had been built to the west of the original or lower kitchen garden. The buildings of Lindsay Hall now stand on the site of the upper garden, some of whose walls remain. The head gardener's house, in one corner of the stable courtyard (now the Music Department) looked out across the lower garden (Fig. 10). In this garden, as well as vineries there was a peach house, which also contained nectarines, and forcing houses for melons, pineapples and cucumbers. There were heated pits where early potatoes, kidney beans and carrots were raised, while on the walls

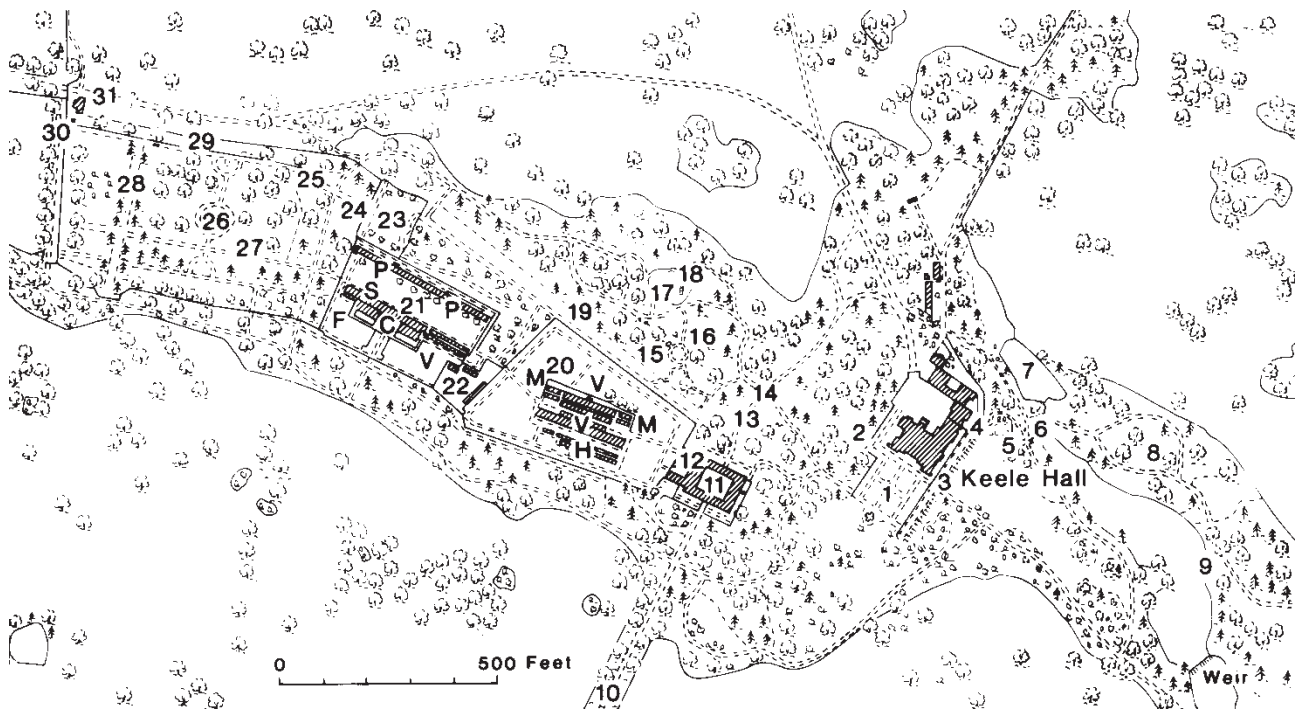


FIGURE 11. The Pleasure Grounds and Kitchen Gardens at Keele in 1877. Features in brackets are no longer in existence.

1. Formal garden (restored in 1985) and fountain; 2. 'High rugged rock', high perpendicular, built from blocks of rock in 1832; 3. Terrace, designed by Nesfield in 1844; 4. [Ice-house, built in 1849]; 5. White Well, re-roofed in 1887; 6. Viaduct at head of lake, built in 1832; 7. [Site of lake, filled in between 1877 and 1898]; 8. 'Mountain', built up in 1831 with soil excavated to deepen lake; 9. Crags built up from blocks of rock in 1832; 11. Stable courtyard built 1833-34, designed by Blore; 12. Gardener's house, now music department; 13. Gorge leading to stables, cut in 1834; 14. Bridge over gorge; 15. [Thatched summer-house in quarry]; 16. Tunnel leading to quarry; 17. Quarry, converted to picturesque fernery; 18. Viaduct across entrance to quarry, built 1834. [Arches from Hulton Abbey erected on viaduct 1883, removed 1952]; 19. Ancient avenue of Chestnut [and Firs]; 20. Lower garden, walls built in 1764 V[Vineries], H [Heated pits], M[Houses for Pineapples, Melons and Cucumbers]; 21. [Lower garden made by 1856]: C [Conservatory], S [Show house], F[Fig house], P [Peach house]; 22. [Coke yard]; 23. [Italian garden, on site of eighteenth-century bowling green]; 24. [Brass gates]; 25. [Small circular garden, surrounded by thick trimmed Holly hedge, with niches for statues and marble busts on tall pedestals]; 26. [Rosary]; 27. [Ribbon borders]; 28. A venue of Deodars, planted in 1851; 29. Holly hedge, probably planted in 1769; 30. Glass gates and summer-house; 31. Holly lodge, formerly Orchard lodge, built in 1860

of the garden were pears, currants and morello cherries and more peaches and nectarines (Fig. 11). In the upper garden, as well as further vineries there was a large conservatory (Fig. 12) filled with flowering plants and climbers such as Passion Flower, *Lapageria*, *Bougainvillea*, and *Plumbago*. Backing on to this was a north-facing show house with oranges, camellias and azaleas. There was also a peach house 320 feet long, copied from one at Bowood, Wiltshire, containing mostly apricots. A fig house originally contained trees of six different varieties, but later there was only one huge tree - but with all six varieties grafted on to it. An 'apple' tunnel was formed by training trees over trellis and it extended for a considerable distance. Although Ralph Sneyd had not eaten an apple for many years, thirteen different varieties were grown.

The pleasure grounds were extensive and in three sections. On the south-west side of Keele Hall a sunken parterre, with a fountain in a large basin beyond, was set in a large lawn, with a backdrop of conifers and other trees (Fig. 13). The parterre was obliterated by huts erected by the army in the



FIGURE 12. The gardeners, carrying their tools of office, standing in front of the conservatory in the upper garden. The conservatory, with ridge and furrow glazing, stood until about 1960, when Lindsay Hall was developed on this site

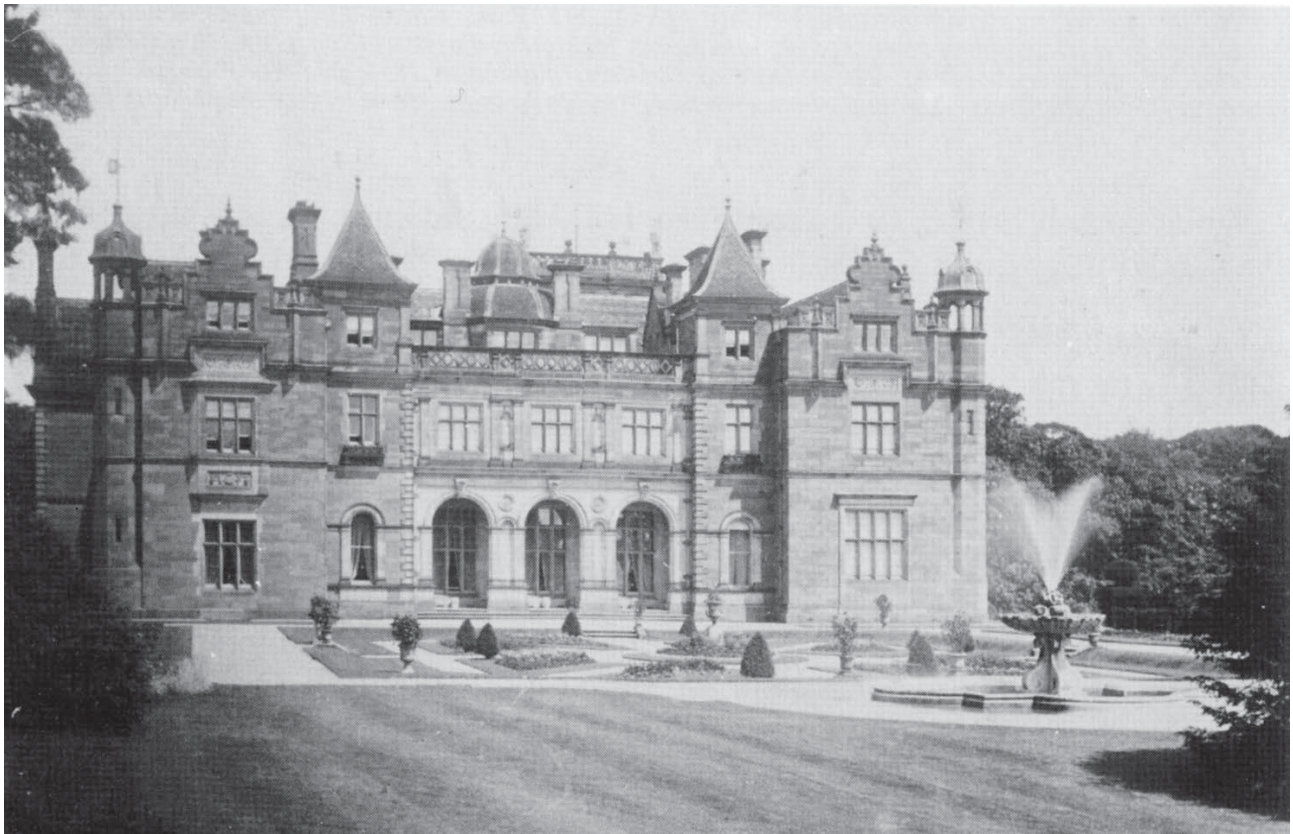


FIGURE 13. The sunken parterre fountain immediately below the southwest front of the hall. Two concrete huts were built on this site by the army during World War Two. The parterre was restored, in simplified form, in 1985.



FIGURE 14. The lake below the hall. The artificial crags, built using natural stone, are visible on the opposite bank.

1939-45 war, but it was restored in a simplified form in 1985. On the south-east side of the Hall gravel walks led down to the lakes and then through woodland walks lined with spring flowers (Figs. 14 and 15).

The second section of the pleasure grounds lay to the north-east of the walled gardens and was reached by a bridge over the rocky, fern-lined gorge leading from the Hall to the stables (Fig. 16). This was a wooded area, with deodars, monkey puzzles and magnificent trees of the large-leaved holly 'Hodginsii' and huge specimens of the scarlet-flowered *Rhododendron arboreum*. Many of these still survive. The now-picturesque old quarry had climbing roses growing up deodars and herbaceous plants such as *Viola cornuta* and London Pride in the rockwork. Separating this wooded area, with its network of paths, from a terrace walk above the lower walled garden was an ancient avenue of pollarded Sweet Chestnuts, with some limbs supported by chains, and others protected from decay by sheets of lead. Some of these Chestnuts still stand forming possibly the oldest designed feature on the estate, as this was probably the original avenue from the village to the Elizabethan Hall (Fig. 17).

The third section of the pleasure grounds was perhaps the most surprising, for it was to the west of the upper walled garden and extended nearly half a mile from Keele Hall. It covered the area where the Larchwood now stands. It was sheltered on the north side by a massive holly hedge, one of the features of Keele which most impressed horticultural journalists in the nineteenth century, both because of its size and because of the amount of labour needed to keep it nicely clipped and trimmed. Estimates of its size vary; the most reliable suggests that it was 200 yards long, 25 feet high and 18 feet thick (Fig. 18). In 1871 it was thought to be about one hundred years old and in 1769 there is a record of 'planting Hollies about Stubb's Croft and down north side of great park' which could refer



FIGURE 15. The southeast front of Keele Hall from the lake. By late Victorian times, trees and shrubs had been planted in large clumps on the lawn below the hall. The punt was supplied by John Pemberton of Liverpool in September 1850 and cost £5 10s. 6d.

to this hedge.¹⁰¹ A gravel walk along the sheltered, southern side of the hedge led through a holly arch to the Glass Gates, a large pair of wrought iron gates, set in imposing stone piers, glazed to shelter the visitor from the winds, but allowing a view across the park to the distant Welsh mountains (Fig. 19). Set into the holly hedge, just within the gates, was a summer house lined with Minton tiles. Both gates and summer house still stand, although the former are in a poor condition and have lost their glass.

Running parallel with the holly hedge and 200 feet to the south of it was a turf walk 160 yards long, with ribbon borders on either side of it (Fig. 20). This was crossed by an avenue of deodars, planted here in 1851 and now mature trees. In the centre of these pleasure grounds was a circular rosary with a conically trained yew in the centre. Elsewhere were orchards with pyramidally trained pears and apples, flower beds with Asters, Lavender, Honeysuckle and old-fashioned Roses such as Moss, Cabbage and Old Provence and a small circular garden, surrounded by a trimmed holly hedge with niches for statues and marble busts on tall pedestals. Most of this was swept away between the wars and larches were planted on the site.

Ralph Sneyd enjoyed his landscaping. In 1862 he wrote:

I am in such beauty that I am drawn like a double tooth. My beauty indeed entails some inconvenience, for people flock from all quarters to see the red Rhododendrons which are a perfect conflagration (I really never saw a more *splendid* sight) and I am headed by beards and crinolines on every gravel walk (Fig. 21).¹⁰²

He was widely known and consulted for his expertise in tree-planting and landscaping. In 1844 he was at Trentham and wrote in his diary: ‘passed the whole day in staking out an approach from



FIGURE 16. The Gorge, leading from hall to stables, was cut through a ridge in 1833. The walls are of Keele sandstone, partly natural, partly built up. The near section was refaced with Macclesfield stone in 1962. The original ornamental stone balustrade of the bridge was replaced with brick about 50 years ago.



FIGURE 17. The avenue of old pollarded Sweet Chestnuts and Firs next to the terrace above the walled garden. The limbs of the Chestnuts are supported by chains and lead plates cover damaged boughs. The Fir trees have now gone, but most of the Chestnuts survive. This was perhaps the original drive from Keele village to the hall.

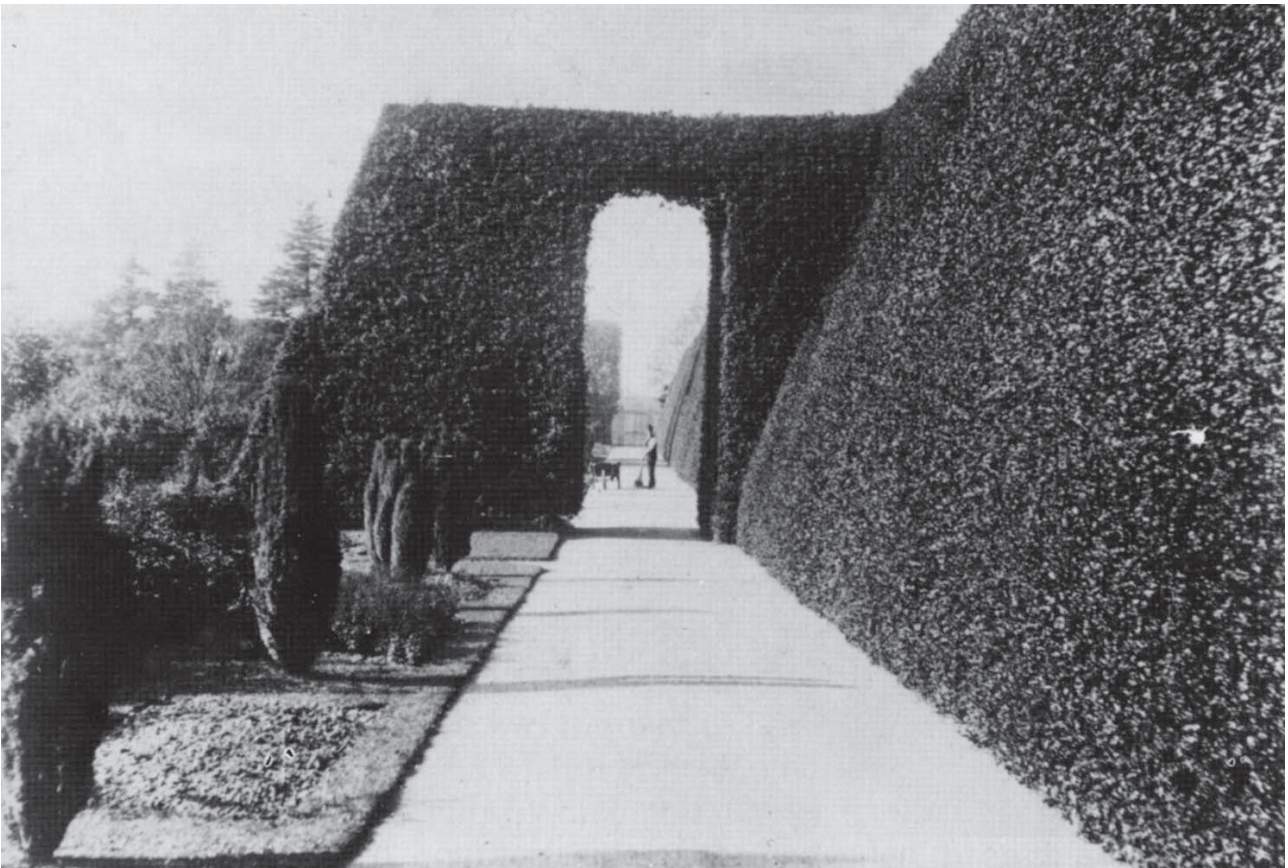


FIGURE 18. A view along the Holly hedge towards the glass gates. The pleasure gardens, on the left, were sheltered by the hedge from the north wind. The hedge, probably planted in 1769, still stands, separating Larchwood gardens from a car park.

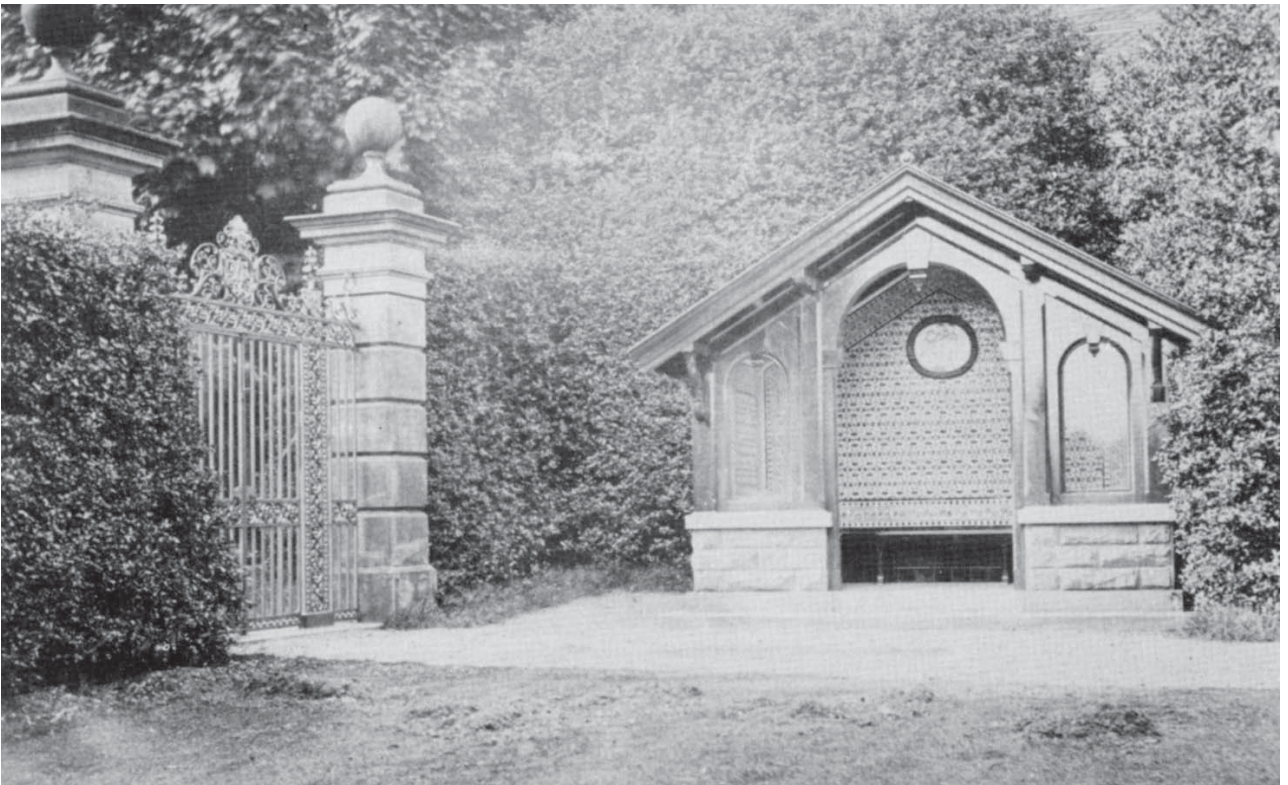


FIGURE 19. The glass gates and summerhouse at the end of the Holly hedge. The glazing of the gates gave shelter from the wind sweeping in from the open parkland beyond. The summerhouse is decorated inside with Minton tiles. Both summerhouse and gates still stand, although the gates are in poor condition.



FIGURE 20. The Ribbon Borders, 160 yards long, ran east-west across the lower part of the pleasure - ground, where Larchwood now stands. The planting scheme is described in a number of accounts, but this photograph appears to correspond with a description of 1871, with Hollyhocks and Red Hot Pokers at the back, then rows of purple Zelinda Dahlias, Double White Feverfew, Stella Nosegay Pelargoniums, Lobelia erinus speciosa and with Cerastium at the front. The borders have now gone, but the Deodars, on left and right are now mature trees.

the Whitmore side with Messrs Nesfield, Barry and Lock. My advice was accepted'.¹⁰³ Mrs. A.H. Baring invited him to visit her house, The Grange, in Hampshire to criticize the 'vast schemes of improvement' that were proposed there.¹⁰⁴ He was also consulted in 1859 on the replanting of the Long Walk Avenue in Windsor Park. There were difficulties because of Royal Prejudices against the British Oak. The soil was unsuitable for Lime and the Turkey Oak (which Prince Albert favoured) 'is a worthless tree'. Eventually, British Oak was planted.¹⁰⁵

When Ralph Sneyd died in 1870, the vicar of Wolstanton said of him in a sermon:

Few men have done so much in their own neighbourhoods as he to promote a taste for that earliest of all pursuits of man, and at the same time, most elevating and beautiful, the taste for gardening. Few landlords can show an estate on which hall, farm and cottage are in more perfect keeping.¹⁰⁶

Gothick Follies and Hermits

Ralph was succeeded by his brother, the Reverend Walter Sneyd. He made few changes in the grounds, the most notable reflecting his antiquarian interests. Some workmen repairing land drains on part of the Sneyd estate at Milton, six miles from Keele on the far side of the Potteries, discovered blocks of carved stone. It was known that the thirteenth century Hulton Abbey had been in this area although

K E E L E H A L L G A R D E N S.—The Regulations for seeing these Gardens for the future will be as follow :—

The Gardens will be open to the Public on Tuesdays and Fridays only, from 2 o'clock P.M. till 6. No one will be allowed to remain after 6 o'clock P.M.

Every one must apply on arrival at the house of Mr. HILL, the Head Gardener, who will receive their names and furnish them with a Guide to accompany them on their walk.

No Pic-nics are allowed on any pretext.

No Carriages or Horses will be permitted to put up at Keele Hall Stables, but accommodation can be obtained at the Sneyd Arms, Keele Village.

FIGURE 21. The gardens at Keele, like others in the neighbourhood, such as Trentham Hall and Biddulph Grange, were regularly open to the public. This advertisement appeared in the Staffordshire Advertiser on 13 August, 1870.

nothing survived above ground. Walter had the site excavated and many of the finds brought to Keele. Some of the stone mouldings were used to construct lancet windows in a wall built on the viaduct at the entrance to the old quarry, thus making it even more picturesque (Fig. 22).¹⁰⁷ In 1952 it was thought appropriate to take down this remarkable late nineteenth-century folly and to return the worked stone to the site of Hulton Abbey.

Is it an accident that there are amongst the estate papers for this period two letters applying for the post of hermit? One of the applicants wrote:

I having been informed that you want a hermit on your estate I beg to offer you my labour with comperliments being sure of success I can bide my time a way in solitude and I am certain I could under go 7 years easy enough I am a respectfull man good references a shoe maker by trade I am a Cheshire man. Pleas state terms and particulars and believe me to be your humble servant.¹⁰⁸

The Sporting Estate

Walter died in 1888 and was succeeded by his son, Colonel Ralph Sneyd. He did not share the scholarly interests of his father, but was keenly interested in horses, shooting and fishing. This led to the development of the sporting potential of the estate.

A race course was built to the south of the Hall, on the site where Penfields farm had once stood. The Chestnut drive down from the stables, past Lymes Lodge, became the approach to it for house parties. For other visitors a private station was built on the Newcastle to Market Drayton railway line. The first meeting on this steeplechase course was held in May 1895.¹⁰⁹ A start was made on laying out a straight mile, but this was not completed, it is said because the Boer War intervened. The remains of this straight mile were still clearly visible until the motorway was constructed along it in the 1960s. Race meetings were only held at Keele for about ten years and the grandstand was moved to Uttoxeter race course about 1911. Colonel Ralph, as one might expect, also bred race horses. A stud farm (now Paddocks Farm) was built in the park and two paddocks made beside the drive to the village, just beyond the glass gates. A drive, separating the paddocks, led between banks of rhododendrons and holly to the stud farm.



FIGURE 22. The old quarry, from which stone was probably cut for the original Elizabethan hall. In the 1830s the quarry was made picturesque, with a path leading into it through a tunnel on the right, past built-up stone walls, across a viaduct (just visible under the ivy) at the entrance to the quarry and then up steps on the left. On the viaduct can be seen the two pointed arches built using worked medieval stone from Hulton Abbey in the 1880s. The quarry was planted with ferns, climbing roses and other plants.

The lakes were developed for trout fishing. A hatchery, now gone, was built at the head of the top lake to make use of the pure spring water which had once supplied the house. The fry were moved to raising tanks, of which the brick bases remain in the woodland below the third lake. The fish were then released into the lowest lake and as they grew were moved up lake by lake until, as full grown specimens, they were placed in the top lake for Colonel Ralph to catch. ¹¹⁰

Game birds were raised, originally in a pheasantry near the race course, later in pens by the cottages at Gateside Corner, where there were kennels as well. A nine hole golf course was laid out on the field which now leads up to the Observatory and the professional lived in Newcastle Lodge.

There were numerous house parties through the 1890s to enjoy the sport provided, but this hectic activity did not last. As John Wallis, head gardener from Hill's death in 1878 until 1899 said:

Mr Ralph Sneyd never appeared to regard Keele with much affection as a residence and eventually the place was leased to the Grand Duke Michael of Russia.

There was then a golden Edwardian afternoon during the years 1901-1910 when the Grand Duke was at Keele. During this time the grounds were well maintained as a brilliant backcloth to country-house life, the high point of which was a week-end visit from Edward VII in 1901.

After 1910 a succession of tenants leased the Hall. Colonel Ralph Sneyd lived until 1949 but although he visited Keele from time to time he never lived there again. Generations of Sneyds had lavished care, time and resources on the landscape and gardens of Keele and had gained great enjoyment from this work. Now, through the neglect of one generation, the grounds drifted gently into decay.

ILLUSTRATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photographs of the grounds are undated, but are all before 1890. I am grateful to Mr John Kolbert for many of them. I am also grateful to Mr G.N. Bell, of Knight and Sons, for allowing me to make use of *The Book of Reference to the Maps of the Manors and Estates belonging to Walter Sneyd Esq., 1828-1830*; to Mr Brian Stokes for pointing out to me the advertisement, Figure 17; to Mr Peter Hayden and Mrs R.S. Soleveichika for obtaining the photograph, Figure 2; to Mr W. Bedson for much information and help; and to Dr Ian Fraser and Mrs Christine Fyfe, archivists in Keele University Library, for considerable help.

REFERENCES

The Sneyd manuscripts, prefixed '5', are part of the Raymond Richards Collection held in the Library of the University of Keele. I am grateful to the Librarian for allowing me to quote from them. The Wedgwood papers, on deposit in the Library of the University of Keele, are the property of Messrs Josiah Wedgwood and Sons Ltd., of Barlaston, Staffordshire and are cited here by their kind permission.

1. J.M. Kolbert, *The Sneyds, Squires of Keele* (1976)
2. S.1610
3. S.1627
4. S.541
5. S.2885, 22 July 1744, Edward Bentham to Ralph Sneyd
6. S.[LC]/52 n.d. Ralph Sneyd to Lady Chester
7. S.ILC]/38 28 March 1745, R.S. to Lady Chester
8. S.[LC]/41 20 May 1746, Blest Colclough to Lady Chester
9. S.[LC]/42 21 May 1746, Edward Sneyd to Lady Chester
10. S.1941 April/May 1749
11. S.1620
12. S.2756, S.1458
13. S.2756, Dec.1762, William Baker to Mrs Sneyd
14. S.1924
15. S.1968, 10 April 1764; S.1924
16. S.1968, 31 Dec. 1764
17. S.2204; S.1972, 31 Dec. 1768
18. S.1972; S.1973, 2 Sept. 1769; S.1968, 29 Dec. 1770
19. S.1970, March 1768
20. Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (Oxford, 1686), p.335; J. Leighton, 'Frying pans: a forgotten craft at Keele', *Staffordshire Archaeology*, (1972), 9.
21. Peter Hayden, 'British seats on Imperial Russian tables', *Garden History*, xiii (1985), 17-32
22. Wedgwood papers 18484-25, 30 July 1773
23. Wedgwood papers 18496-25, 6 Nov. 1773
24. G.C. Williamson, *The Imperial Russian Dinner Service* (1909). Mr. Rodney Hampson has pointed out to me that although no good view of the Pavilion survives, a ceramic model of a dovecot in the City Museum, Stoke-on-Trent may be based on it. The model resembles

the known sketches and carries the words 'A New Pavilion'. See *Northern Ceramic Society Newsletter* no.43 (1981), p.30.

25. S.1941
26. S.2957, 8 April 1789, 19 March 1791
27. S.1970
28. S.2957
29. S.1924
30. S.2957, 12 Sept. 1768
31. John Harvey, *Early Nurseryman* (1974), pp.74, 94; John Harvey, 'Prices of Roses in the Eighteenth Century', *The Rose Annual 1979* (1979), pp.161-3. I am grateful to Mr. W. Bedson for allowing me to see and reproduce this catalogue.
32. *Survey of London*, xli (1983), 58
33. S.1457, 17 Oct. 1775
34. S.2957, 27 July 1781, 26 April 1788
35. S.2957, 28 Jan. 1778
36. S.2957, 20 March 1774, 31 Dec. 1784
37. S.2957, 31 Dec. 1770, 23 Dec. 1790, 15 July 1783
38. S.1970, 26 March 1770
39. S.2957, 24 Dec. 1778, 30 April 1774
40. S.2957, 20 Oct. 1785
41. Wedgwood papers, 2589-3, 25 Jan. 1790
42. *The Military Forces of Staffordshire in the nineteenth century* (*Staffs. Advertiser*, 1901, reprinted 1984), p.7
43. S.1457, 28 Aug. 1796
44. S.1457, 21 Oct. 117194
45. S.1457, 2 April 1797
46. S.1457, 19 June 1798
47. S.1457, 5 Aug. 1798
48. S.1457, 16 Oct. 1798
49. S.1457, 21 Oct. 1798; S.2003, 1 Nov. 1798
50. S.1457, 28 Oct. 1798
51. S.1457, 5 Nov. 1798
52. S.1457, 18 Nov. 1798
53. J.H. Harvey, 'Two early nurseries: Knowsley, Lancs. and Knutsford, Cheshire', *Journal of the Chester Arch. Soc.*, 1976, pp.66-83
54. Cheshire Record Office, DDX/363/6-8
55. W.J. Bean, *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles*, iii (1976), 742
56. H.R. Fletcher, *The Story of the Royal Horticultural Society, 1804-1968* (1969), pp.19, 22-5, 48.
57. Barbara & Hensleigh Wedgwood, *The Wedgwood Circle, 1730-1897* (1980), p.144
58. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13 Oct. 1810. I am indebted to Mr. Rodney Hampson for this reference.
59. Wedgwood papers, 2594-3; 2597-3
60. S.1457, 12 May 1799
61. S.1457, 8 Aug. 1799
62. S.1457, 19 July 1799
63. Staffs. Record Office, Q.S. Papers, Highway Diversions; Epiphany 1814(2), Sept.1834(2), Epiphany 1840(2)
64. SC9/141, 19 Sept. 1829, R.S. to Lord Dover
65. M. Hadfield, R. Harding & L. Highton, *British Gardeners* (1980), p.134. I am also grateful to Mrs Mavis Batey for her comments on Gilpin.

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

66. SC9/144, 8 Nov. 1829, R.S. to Lord Dover
67. SC19/180, 1 Sept. 1832, W.S. Gilpin to Ralph Sneyd
68. SC4/174, 23 Sept. 1832, R.S. to Marchioness of Bute
69. S[RS/HWV] 49, 5 Oct. 1834, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
70. SC9/167, 8 Sept. 1831, R.S. to Lord Dover
71. S[RS/HWV] 58, 18 Nov. 1835, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
72. S[RS/HWV] 34, 21 May 1831, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
73. SC9/150, 18 April 1830, R.S. to Lord Dover
74. SC20/191, 15 April 1831, Lord Mahon to R.S.
75. SC9/145, 7 Dec. 1829, R.S. to Lord Dover
76. SC4/194, 18 Dec. 1829, R.S. to Marchioness of Bute
77. SC4/217, 2 Oct. 1831, R.S. to Marchioness of Bute
78. S[RS/HWV] 34, 21 May 1831, R.S. to H.W. Vincent. Elsewhere Ralph also refers disparagingly to Kent's designs for the landscape of Keele. There is no sign in the archives that William Kent worked at Keele, and it is very unlikely that he did so, as he died in 1748 before extensive landscaping had started.
79. SC9/176, 21 Aug. 1832, R.S. to Lord Dover
80. S.1459, 12 July 1834, Samuel Peake to R.S.
81. S.1459, 20 June 1833; 4 June 1834, Samuel Peake to R.S.
82. S[RS/HWV] 43, 30 Aug. 1832, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
83. S.1459, 18 Oct. 1832, Samuel Peake to R.S.
84. S[RS/HWV] 43, 30 Aug. 1832, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
85. S.1459, 26 Feb. 1837; 4 Jan. 1840, Samuel Peake to R.S.
86. S.1459, 17 Sept. 1845, Samuel Peake to R.S.
87. S[RS/HWV] 66, 26 May 1836, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
88. *Victoria County History of Staffordshire*, ii (1967), 306, 309
89. S.2768
90. S[RS/HWV] 120, Spring 1844, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
91. S.2768, 29 June 1843, W.A. Nesfield to R.S.
92. S80/91 (Box 38)
93. *Staffordshire Advertiser* 19 June 1847. I am grateful to Mr. Rodney Hampson for this reference.
94. S.2238
95. S.1468
96. S[RS/HWV] 299, 11 Jan. 1855, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
97. SC9/240, 11 Sept. 1856, R.S. to Lady Dover
98. *Gardener's Chronicle* (1876) i, p.213
99. *Cottage Gardener*, xvii (1856), 106-108 *1. Horticulture & Cottage Gardener*, xxx (1863), 234-237, 274-276; *Gardener's Chronicle*, (1871) 1452-1453; *Gardener's Chronicle* (1872) 109-111; *Gardener's Chronicle* (1883) ii, 720-722; *Gardener's Chronicle* (1893) i, 9, 10-11, 17, 19; *Gardener's Chronicle* (1916) i, 330-331. I am grateful to Mr. Ray Desmond for giving me these references in advance of the publication of his *Bibliography of British Gardens* (1984). Much of the description that follows is drawn from these accounts.
100. *Gardener's Chronicle* (1876) i, 213
101. S.1970
102. S[RS/HWV] 432, 9 May 1862, R.S. to H.W. Vincent
103. S.3707, 15 April 1844. Barry was the architect of the new house at Trentham and probably the designer of the great parterre. Loch was the agent to the Sutherland estates.
104. SC19/25, n.d., Mrs A.H. Baring to R.S.
105. SC19/197, 25 Aug. 1859, Charles Gore to R.S.; SC19/198, 25 Aug. 1859, copy letter, Charles Gore to Duke of Bedford

LANDSCAPES AND GARDENS AT KEELE

106. *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 13 August 1870
107. *Trans. of the N. Staffs. Field Club* (1885), p.29; *Ibid.*, (1887) p.34. Before he inherited Keele, Walter had lived at Denton House, Oxfordshire. Here, in 1844-45, four years after he obtained the property, he rebuilt, in his garden, fragments of late medieval tracery. These came from Brasenose College and included the original east window from the Chapel. *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*. v (1957), 106.
108. S.1507, 11 March 1894, from William Drinkwater. The other letter is earlier, 13 March 1883, about the time the Hulton excavations were carried out. Walter Sneyd was fond of antiquarian jokes. Could he, or one of his friends, have written the earlier letter?
109. *Racing Illustrated*, 18 Nov. 1896, p.486
110. I am grateful to Mr. Peter Heath for this information.
111. *Gardener's Chronicle* (1907), p.111