Try our website; especially the calendar page which shows all our events

www.bnta.org.uk

BIRMINGHAM
National Trust Association

A voluntary Association of National Trust members founded in 1991 to promote and prosper the work of the National Trust

Newsletter

Issue 32  Autumn 2007

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** STOP PRESS **

A few seats are left on coach outing to Bath on Saturday 8th September.

Phone Muriel on 0121 475 8974

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Chairman’s Report

Programmed Events
At the AGM on 21st April I was able to report on another year of most enjoyable lectures, outings and social events, and called on the meeting to convey our thanks to the various organisers of these events.
Since then we have had the majority of this year’s programme of outings.
Despite the varying weather conditions reports from the outings suggest we all enjoyed ourselves.
The same goes for the small band of ramblers (or should I say “amblers”) who have ventured forth on the last Saturday of most months.

We include a few snaps to show the rest of you what you have been missing.

Packhorse Bridge - April 2007

The “Summer” Garden Party was an oasis of sunshine in a particularly wet spell. I recall getting soaked the day before as we put up the gazebos, with our hostess insisting that it would be “a lovely day tomorrow”. Our thanks to Joyce Briggs for brow beating the elements so successfully, and for sharing with us the beautiful venue that her years of effort have produced.

Presidency - Farewell to Grace
At the AGM we said farewell to our President Grace Darby who was standing down from the post which she had held since 1998. For a dozen or more years before that she had played a variety of key roles in this Association, and in its predecessor - the Midlands Centre. Throughout this time she gave talks to other National Trust groups, and to Gardening Clubs across the Midlands, donating many fees to our
Association, and hence to National Trust Projects. The Committee decided we should both express our thanks to Grace, and mark her exemplary service, with the presentation of a framed picture that comes from the Trust’s own repository of items available for such special occasions.

**Presidency - Hail to Chris**

I am sure you will all be pleased to learn (if you have not already heard) that, in anticipation of Grace’s retirement, your Committee had the foresight to invite Chris Upton to become our next President. I was delighted to report at the AGM that he had accepted this invitation.

![Chris Upton](image)

Chris is a Senior Lecturer in History at Newman College of Higher Education and writes a twice weekly column for the Birmingham Post. He trawled the archives of the Post’s letters columns to enthral and amuse us at our Anniversary Lunch last October with a talk entitled “Yours – Disgusted”. He is also the author of histories of Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Lichfield, including one particularly close to the interests of our Association entitled “Living Back-to-Back”. We look forward to having him in our midst, and to a pleasant and fruitful collaboration.

**Committee Membership**

Brian Pratt stood down from the Committee at the AGM after many years of service. His distinctive contribution has been to establish a format for car outings that has enabled many of us to visit historic houses, and a few other places of interest, that we might otherwise never have discovered for ourselves. An appreciation is given elsewhere in this Newsletter. Otherwise our Committee Membership remains embarrassingly static. The tasks of organising our events are falling on fewer, and inevitably older, shoulders each year. We would welcome any input of “new blood” into the running of the Association. Clearly the more time you could devote to any of our enterprises, the more welcome that would be; but even a few modest contributions from several members would help us feel more confident of our future.  

*Graham McCauley*
### Voices from the past

Our principle guest speaker at the AGM was David Brown who spoke on “35 Years with the National Trust”. There was no shortage of fascinating anecdotes of his encounters with Trust staff, volunteers and indeed benefactors whose properties he helped to shepherd into the fold.

The Association made a presentation to David to mark his retirement this Autumn as an officer of the Trust. Appropriately the presentation was made by our retiring President who was also receiving a farewell gift.

David and Grace were both able to recall the trials and tribulations that accompanied the creation of our present Association following the demise of its predecessor. They sounded stern warnings at the dangers that could arise from the failure to recruit new blood into the running of

### Barber Lectures

One of the many jobs that David Brown did was to conjure up an annual list of four speakers for the series of lectures given each Autumn under the joint auspices of the Barber Institute and the National Trust.

We as an Association were not directly involved beyond providing door stewards and buffet staff for the occasion. And of course we included a leaflet on the series each year in our Autumn mailing. In case you were searching for that leaflet, it seems that there will not be a series of lectures this Autumn, though we may live in hope for the Spring.

### Christmas Social

**Monday 17th December 2007**  
**Friends Meeting House, Cotteridge**  
**at 7.30 pm**

This year’s entertainment will be provided by four young instrument-alists. They are very talented young people and we are delighted to be able to hear them.

A Buffet Supper will follow the concert. Those who attended last year’s Social will be pleased that we have managed to arrange for a similar meal: Savouries and desserts with mineral water etc. followed by tea or coffee.

The cost for Concert and Supper will be as last year - £9. Please apply for tickets using the form enclosed and send a cheque for £9 with s.a.e to Joan Stoker as soon as possible.
**Back-to-Backs**

You may recall from our Spring Newsletter that two of the donations we planned to make from the £5,200 surplus funds that we raised last year were to the Back-to-Back Houses in Hurst Street. These were for £500 each, and were duly approved at our Annual General Meeting. This remarkable National Trust property celebrated its “Third Birthday” on 21st July with a small party.

As well as the staff and the volunteers who have guided an amazing 100,000 visitors through the property so far, the guests included representatives of the various Midlands Associations who, like us, regularly support specific projects there. We wish all concerned

**Thanks Brian**

Brian Pratt has organised our car outings for many years. The outing to Dunwood Hall and Rode Hall on 4 August was his last for BNTA. Thank you Brian. Many of us have been able to visit properties not normally open to the public and on many occasions have met the owners.

Over the years Brian has also smuggled into our deliberations words of wisdom from his experience in other bodies that, like the National Trust, aim to cherish our heritage. In a previous Newsletter he wrote asking for someone to come forward to take over the task. There have been no volunteers so far. We hope that others will come forward to continue Brian’s work. As he explained in that note in last Autumn’s Newsletter he promises to hold the hand of any successor for a while yet!

**Anniversary Lunch**

*Saturday, 6th October 2007*
Tally Ho Conference Centre, Pershore Road, Edgbaston.
Speaker: Mr David Howe
“Laughter is the best form of medicine”

There is still time to apply for tickets for this year’s Anniversary Lunch. Ticket details and menu choices all as in the Spring Newsletter. Please send your application and cheque to Joan Stoker as soon as possible. If you have mislaid these details please telephone Joan on 0121 459 6280.

**Mary Parker’s Lunch**

Mary Parker’s annual Lunch will be held on Saturday 5 January 2008. Tickets cost £4 for a 2-course lunch. There will be home-made cake and marmalade on sale but no bring & buy. There will be a raffle and probably a quiz. Please note the new venue: 1 Hunstanton Avenue, Harborne - just down Winchfield Avenue from Hagley Road West. Please complete the booking form and return it to Mary with a cheque made payable to E M Parker and an SAE.
The Rambling Year in Photos

Autumn at Blackroot Pool - Nov 2006

Breeches Pool - September 2006

Moseley Bog Dragon - October 2006

Lower Bittell - July 2007

Wombourne Drinkers - June 2007

For colour versions of these photos you can telephone the Chairman (or see the website later in the year)
Membership Information

Membership Subscriptions for 2008
After holding the subscription at £5 for many years it was decided at the AGM to raise it to £6 for 2008 onwards. (The charge for two or more people at the same address will be £11) Membership subscriptions for 2008 fall due on the 31st of December 2007 but we enclose reminders with the Late Summer Mailing to save postage. You can send your subscription as soon as you wish but please avoid the Christmas rush as letters have got lost in this busy period. We prefer payment before Christmas so that time is available for holiday planning in January. Our constitution allows late payments until the end of February but we normally don’t delete names until the summer!

If you pay by standing order you will need to cancel your existing standing order as well as creating a new one. You can do this on-line, in person at the bank or by posting a new Standing Order Mandate with a letter making it clear that this new order replaces the old one. It is best to do this at least a month before the due date. A sample letter is enclosed for you to use directly, copy, adapt or ignore as you wish. Your 2008 membership card is also enclosed with this mailing. You may change to paying by cheque if you prefer, but you will still need to cancel your existing Standing Order.

We hope that you will all renew your subscriptions for the coming year.

NT Membership Numbers
To be a member of our Association you should be a current member of the National Trust. We need a record of each member’s NT numbers for insurance and other purposes. If your NT membership has lapsed then we hope that you will renew it. Please can you check on the enclosed letter that we have your correct NT details, particularly the numbers for second and third people at the same address.

Data Protection
For space reasons the usual statement has been removed from your individual letters. We only keep factual information for our use in running the association – you can ask to see what we hold on you if you wish. We do not give out your information to outside bodies and only the membership secretary and treasurer have access to all the data; some committee members have membership numbers, names, addresses and telephone numbers.

NOTES FROM MARY
As a result of Paul Hopkins’s visit to Cotteridge, some of our members sponsored his cycle ride to Amsterdam. We sent £125 to Motor Neurone Disease. Thank you for your support.

Would you be prepared to serve tea and coffee at the Cotteridge meetings? If so, please complete the enclosed reply slip.

MacMillan Coffee Morning
Friday 28 September 2007 10am-1230pm
Please come along to 1 Hunstanton Avenue, Harborne and support this good cause.
Heelis and Cardiff - May and July 2007

Following a visit from Earle Kessler to the Association last October, I arranged a visit to Heelis, the Trust's new Central Office in Swindon. We went on a wet and miserable Friday in May, but our spirits were lifted as soon as we entered the building. Heelis was the first 'green' building I had visited, and I was very impressed.

All the timber used was reclaimed from properties which lost mature trees in gales over the past few decades (Phil Mayhew was able to identify most of them, which was also very impressive) and the carpet was made from Herdwick sheep fleeces.

Having moved houses recently, I asked for any offcuts - without success! We were extremely fortunate to visit Heelis so soon after opening as they only have tours on Fridays and now have an 18-month waiting list.

I then went on Greta’s outing to Cardiff in July and spent some time visiting the National Assembly for Wales and the Senedd. It is a building that blends traditional Welsh slate, glass and wood. Once through strict security, much of the building is open plan; therefore very light and airy and the views over Cardiff Bay are stunning. This building is well worth a visit; and it's free!

Mary Parker
Coach Outings 2007 Report

So far this year we have had four successful visits, despite making a loss on the Wedgwood trip in June, due to a low number on the coach. Our visits to Tyntesfield and Cardiff on sunny days proved very enjoyable to those taking part, with some making their first visit to Tyntesfield and others a third or fourth. All finding it very interesting and seeing the extra rooms now open. Hopefully in 2009 it may be possible to see rooms upstairs!

The visit to ‘Heelis’ National Trust new headquarters in Swindon was most interesting, with a guided tour, seeing all the features used to provide energy efficiency throughout the building and the construction. Then on to Lacock Abbey and Fox Talbot museum of photography.

The tour of Wedgwood was interesting but the visit to the Pottery in Stoke on Trent was especially fascinating as we could walk round the site, which has been left in its entirety when it closed. We were able to see how they worked in the various workshops, all fully explanatory, with ‘hands on’ if you so desired.

In Cardiff most members took the opportunity to take the Open Top Bus tour, some stopping at the Art Gallery to see a wonderful collection made by the Davies sisters, or to visit the new Welsh Assembly building and other places of interest with a windy ride in the Bay area. A guided tour of the Castle was also available.

There are still plenty of places for the Bath visit on 8th September; bookings with Muriel Reay on 0121 475 8974. We look forward to seeing you on this visit or in 2008. If you have any suggestions for future outings please get in touch with Maureen Hill.

Tatton Park Trip

On August 11th, as we were going to press with this Newsletter, a coach party visited Tatton Park in Cheshire. The Estate can still boast some 50 acres of permanent floral and kitchen gardens The most stunning of these are the Italian and Japanese gardens (below).

For those of limited mobility there are ten shopping buggies freely available to tour the gardens - but not the 1000 acre deer park that is the major part of the Estate. The weather was quite fabulous, and a thrilling visit was had by all. Thanks to Maureen for organising this trip.
Summer Garden Party, June 2007

The annual BNTA garden party was held at the home of John and Joyce Briggs in Weoley Hill. We entered through a side courtyard filled with pots of flowers and climbers, into a traditional English garden with a lawn, decorative urns, a painted arbour seat and a summer house.

This delightful garden has many surprises. In one corner there is a small pond with a Japanese bridge and acers. Across the lawn an iron gate leads into a series of small rooms. Through an archway, there is a knot garden, predominately in shades of green and yellow. Further on there is a kitchen garden, and a newly created Bishops' garden. There are secret areas hidden among mature trees, with bronze bird sculptures adding interest.

This inspiring visit ended with a delicious tea on the main lawn. Thanks to the hosts and committee for all their hard work. Fay Harris

Thanks to Graham & Don for the photographs
GORDON LAKER - Eulogy by a friend

I first became acquainted with Gordon in the now far off year of 1951, it was in the Die Drawing office of Birmingham Aluminium Casting Co, where I started as an apprentice draughtsman too, and clearly remember being introduced to Gordon who had just finished his apprenticeship and he helpfully introduced me to the staff and a short tour of the works. In those early days Gordon was always there to help and offer advice.

Gordon was one of three brothers and he once told me as a young boy he was out with his father somewhere in Oldbury, and saw the German airship Graff Zeppelin passing over, silver in colour, which he later learnt was returning from the United States and Canada.

Gordon first started work in the machine shop at Birmingham Aluminium in 1942, entered the apprenticeship scheme in 1945, and he too started in the Die Drawing office in 1950, where he remained until 1985.

In 1955 whilst on holiday on the Isle of Skye he met his wife Rae, who he later married in October 1957. In the sixties Gordon and I worked together in the new Casting Design Development office at Birmal. He told many stories of his love of England, he and Rae were keen on rambling and later joined the National Trust.

Gordon had a keen interest in football which in his younger days he played frequently, and was an ardent supporter of West Bromwich Albion Football Club. He also enjoyed going to the theatre, and concerts at the Symphony hall. His favourite film was “The Sound of Music”, which I understand he saw a total of thirteen times. Gordon, with his wide design experience, worked on the important task of developing casting design production for the Die Cast Aluminium Cylinder Heads for customers such as Rolls-Royce, Jaguar Cars, Reliant, and many more both here and overseas. He was a conscientious and utterly loyal designer and received the coveted 25 and 40 year long service awards.

When he left Birmal he joined Pertemps, were he worked for a further six years, half of this time was spent at the City Engineers office, Birmingham Corporation working on repairing and updating old drawings, a job which he loved. When he finally retired, he still found time to act as a Birmid Industries Pension Representative and attended courses in British History and Literature for 6 years at Birmingham University. Gordon was a Volunteer Room Steward at Packwood House for 17 years where his ashes were scattered on 10 July 2007. Gordon will long be remembered by us all.

(Rae has asked that funds collected in Gordon’s memory are given to BNTA. To date they total nearly £600)
Two Unusual Outings

With our programmes of car and coach outings we tend to cater for two rather different sections of our membership. Most of our outings take us to historic houses and/or gardens, with the car outings being able to gain entry to some privately owned properties that would not normally welcome "coach parties" - even as select as we are.

However this summer both groups visited a couple of places of a much more industrial nature than our usual venues. On 19th May we went by car to Ironbridge to visit the Jackfield Tile Museum and then to the Broseley Pipe Works (also a museum), where clay pipes for smokers used to be made. On 16th June we went by coach to Wedgwood's modern factory and then to the Gladstone Pottery Museum. A few of us went on both outings - and it proved a worthwhile experience.

We had two opportunities to recall the famous moment from "What's My Line" when the panel was faced with a "saggar maker's bottom knocker".

These special containers have passed away decades ago, along with the large bottle kilns in which they were stacked and roasted for several days.

One of the volunteer staff at Broseley still makes a few exhibition clay pipes which he lays out in a single saggar for firing in an electric furnace. The single small bottle kiln at Broseley is only just standing. At Gladstone there are four much large bottle kilns in better repair, but still no longer functional. However there is a fascinating display of machinery for all the stages of preparing the clay. These machines were all run from a single steam engine via an amazing collection of belts and wheels. This whole assembly still works, thanks to a hidden electric motor.

Contemporary technology is on view at the Wedgwood factory. Conveyor belts carry the pieces to be fired slowly through long electric furnaces. We were there on a non-working day, which reduced the excitement, but meant we could hear more of our guide's interesting commentary.

Graham McCauley