Summary of Warley Woods Project by John Worwood and Pat Seddon

How we got involved:

1) Pat

I saw a leaflet in Warley Woods in September 2018 and thought the project sounded interesting. I’d known for years about Repton’s Red book in Sandwell’s Local History library but had never followed it up. Perhaps this would be the encouragement and opportunity I needed. I wasn’t sure how much I needed to know about historical investigations into landscapes but was reassured by Suzanne Carter’s welcoming reply to my email outlining the project and inviting me to an informal session with other interested people. This didn’t seem as daunting as I had first thought.

2) John

I responded to a flyer from the Repton, Galton and Warley Woods Exhibition at the Pavilion in Warley Woods in August/September 2018 which supported the Gardens Trust Celebrating Humphry Repton 2018 activities. I too attended the initial meeting to hear Suzanne Carter outline how the project would unfold and what we volunteers might expect. Coincidentally, that evening there was a talk by Advolly Richmond on Repton at Warley Woods held at Lightwoods House. This kept the interest going for those of us who had attended the meeting in the morning.

How the project developed: John

Suzanne Carter was engaged by the Gardens Trust as the project manager. She arranged several training sessions covering Reading, Researching, Interpreting and Presenting the Landscape to enable volunteers to progress with the project. The first piece of work we completed was a Statement of Significance for the site. We were guided through its preparation by Linden Groves.

Schools outreach: Pat

Abbey Junior School backing onto Warley Woods was a natural choice for the project’s outreach element. The 10 & 11 year olds created amazing artwork inspired by Repton’s Red Book and composed letters from Samuel Galton to Repton describing his feelings on first viewing proposals for his landscape. Their work was displayed in school for parents to view and photographed for wider publicity. One quotation is included in our leaflet, “Repton designed landscapes but never got his hands dirty”.

Leaflet preparation: John

Before attempting to create the leaflet, Steve Slack outlined the different aspects of good leaflet production in a workshop session. At the following meeting, we worked in pairs concentrating on different sections. This was a productive way of working and the leaflet layout was prepared and given to a desktop publishing specialist to create our first draft. There were two further sessions before the leaflet was finalised.

Launch event: Pat

On Bank Holiday Monday 6th May wearing our Repton red T-shirts we hoped for dry weather to explore his landscape. A gazebo in the meadow contained art materials for visitors to create their own artworks drawing inspiration from the Red Book and encouragement from a local art teacher. Guided walks outlined Repton’s plans for the landscape using his ‘before’ and ‘after’ sketches illustrating several sites in the Woods. Other activities included tree measuring using red ribbon as Repton had measured his landscapes; pebble painting; 18th century toys and games and an exhibition of Repton’s life, work and local legacy. These were photographed for future publicity.

Debrief and follow-on: John

Following the launch, I guided a group of 19 people from the Harborne & Edgbaston U3A Local History Group on a 1 ½ hour Repton Ramble, using the materials we had produced and my experience of guiding a Ramble at the launch.

We held a debrief in July when we met to review the project and launch event. We felt the project had achieved what it had set out to do and that the launch event was successful in spite of it being a very cold day.

Suzanne Carter prepared her version of a Warley Woods Red Book for Linden Groves containing a record and examples of the group’s activities during the project.

We discussed some possible follow-on activities.

On 27th August we discussed a short presentation to this meeting and the more formal presentation to the Gardens Trust event on 28th November.

Follow-on activities covering further development of the Repton Revealed project and possible outreach were tabled.