



## SHARING REPTON: THE LEGACY CONTINUES

*The Heritage Lottery Funded Sharing Repton project continued into 2019 developing the work of The Garden Trust's five pilot projects dedicated to raising awareness of the last great landscape designer of the eighteenth century and a man who was the first to describe himself as a Garden Designer, Humphry Repton.*

Northamptonshire Gardens Trust were delighted to treat the guests of the Wellingborough African Caribbean Association Day Centre to a visit to Wicksteed Park on Monday 9 September. From the famous Rose Garden featuring the charming statue of Charles Wicksteed's dog, Jerry, there is a clear view of Barton Hall where in 1793 Charles Tibbit invited Humphry Repton to redesign the landscape.

Not only did these guests share views of this landscape but they were also treated to a Cream Tea, train ride and visit to the newly resurrected ice cream parlour. Some of these guests had mild dementia and the emphasis, whilst still capturing the spirit of Repton, focused on the sensory to stimulate memory. It is recognised that for many elderly people, Wicksteed Park holds very fond memories for themselves and their families. Once again, we had an enthusiastic team of volunteers to share the experience with the guests and their carers.

We are indebted to Wicksteed Park for their invaluable support in helping to make this fun filled event a success. The visit admirably fulfilled our strategic aim of enabling diverse local community groups to visit and enjoy Northamptonshire's rich historic landscapes.

Thank you, Brenda, for this snapshot.

### Wicksteed Park; a Remnant of a Humphry Repton Landscape – Brenda Lofthouse

*Well, thank you, Humphry. The Heritage Lottery funded project "Sharing Repton" enabled Northamptonshire Gardens Trust to invite Wellingborough African Caribbean Association (WACA) to spend an afternoon at Wicksteed Park.*

The Association provides care and support for a diverse community, some of whose members suffer from dementia in its various forms. On the afternoon of the visit the only thing anyone looking or listening to the whole group (dementia sufferers, carers and volunteers) would have been able to observe was the group's shared laughter and sense of fun. Humphry Repton wrote that he "preferred the sight of mankind to that of herds of cattle." He would have been completely at home with WACA.

The visit was planned extremely well by Elaine Johnson and Carol Fitzgerald, in conjunction with Tracey Clarke, the Community Link Manager from Wicksteed Park and WACA. First on the agenda were ice creams. Rum and Raisin went down very well. Ice creams were followed by the train ride round the perimeter of the park, which prompted one of the volunteers to remember the suitcases. A little confused myself, I imagined that she meant suitcases in the context of main-line trains, but, unlike me, she knew that there used to be a display of suitcases on the Wicksteed station platform, and when the train returned to the platform we found them. A visit to Wicksteed invariably evokes wistful memories of childhood pleasure trips to the Park. A quick thank you to St Rita (patron saint of extracting one from potentially difficult situations, a kind of face-saving saint) would have been appropriate.



*... wistful memories of childhood pleasure trips to the Park."*



The train ride was a great success. The echo in the tunnel provided the opportunity for the whole group to go “ooohhh” with such panache that any self-respecting apparition would have retreated for safety. After the train, up the path to the rose garden. The beauty of the flowers, the reds, the oranges, the mauves, was a visual pleasure for the group. It was the first time one of the group had been in the rose garden and he just stood and drank in the colours, his only words were “how beautiful.” At the back of the garden is a statue commemorating Jerry, Charles Wicksteed’s much-loved dog. One lady spoke saying how she loved her daughter’s dog because “he remembers me”. This lady and Charles would have had the most enjoyable of conversations.

Back to the Learning Space, a beautifully designed centre for group activities, a film of Wicksteed Park in the 1950’s was shown, which evoked many memories of times group members were there with their children, especially the delight of the Water Shoot. Nearly everybody seemed to have queued up and climbed the steep stairs for the opportunity to get into a wooden boat, race down a ramp and hit the water so fast that anybody standing in the vicinity would have been soaked. A second film showed a squad of American soldiers performing a choreographed march, the Cookhouse Shuffle. Attempts were made by some members of the group to follow and imitate the American soldiers who had been drilled numerous times. This is the only excuse that can be mustered for the group members (including me) who were at least four beats and one movement behind the actions expected.

*his only words were  
“how beautiful”.*

Northamptonshire Gardens Trust had organised an afternoon tea and this was held in the Learning Space. Sandwiches of every description, numerous cakes and cups of tea, something for every dietary need, were available, and everything was consumed with glee. As the tea was progressing a large wickerwork container was taken round in which were a range of gifts. The gifts had been chosen to promote conversations and bring to mind

times when group members had used the gift they received. The organisers might have been intending the occasion as a lucky dip, but in reality each gift in the basket was turned over and considered very carefully before the selection was made. There was nothing serendipitous about the final choice – it was specifically chosen. A picture was chosen by a blind lady who felt all over the surface as the scene was described to her very carefully so that in the end she said, “I can see this. It is Wicksteed.” Tulip bulbs were picked out because they would enhance the border of the sheltered housing complex. The jar of honey was discussed as the pot came out of the bag and back in the carrier gift bag numerous times. The hand trowel and rake were chosen as the new owner recalled her delight when she had tended her own garden. The conversation about the vegetables was very informative and the volunteers learnt that you could make a salad out of the fronds of the carrot tops, which was not something we had known. The pineapple was one of the heavier gifts but easily raised from the basket as the recipient recalled the different ways she had used the fruit in her cooking.

Then the disco! WACA had brought some music with them, chosen by the group members. A hint of reggae filled the air. Another go at imitating that American soldiers march was done to the music followed by general group dancing. A member of the group was blind and proved to be exceptionally good at dancing and when complimented said that we had not seen anything yet. Her carer had mentioned that when the group went on holiday this lady was the only one that was regularly chatted up. As the afternoon had progressed those in the group who might have been less sure about the situation initially had grown in confidence and by the time the music was played all you could hear above the reggae was laughter and conversations and all you could see was a group of people enjoying moving to the music.

*Thank you, Humphry.*

