

Hackfall

Newsletter 1

Autumn 2003

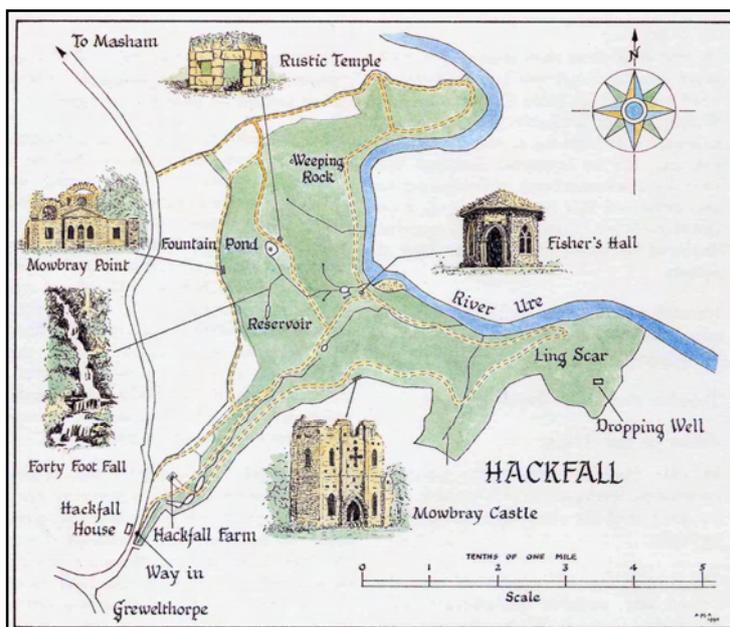
Historical Background

Hackfall was created, as an ornamental landscape, about 1750 by William Aislabie. His father, John Aislabie, who had laid out Studley Royal between 1716 and 1742 had purchased Hackfall for the timber in 1731. It established a reputation as one of the

recognised places to visit for those touring in Yorkshire in the 18th and 19th century. Hackfall was described in many contemporary guide books, and in the journals of some of the tourists, and it is only in the middle of the last century that it fell into obscurity.

Hackfall's attraction was the way in which Aislabie had skilfully exploited the untamed and dramatic landscape of the natural ravine in which it is located. It is a landscape garden in which the objective is confront the tourist with the untamed, romantic, picturesque and sublime facets of Nature. It was in con-

trast to the neat and controlled landscape gardens such as Studley with its clipped geometric water gardens. However, William completed the controlled side of his father's garden at Studley, as well as, adding the wilder Seven Bridges Walk.



Hackfall was recorded by several artists over the years including Turner, Gilpin, Devis and Swete. In fact, so important a garden was Hackfall that several scenes from it were depicted on Catherine the Great's famous Frog Dinner Service – more than any other English garden.

In the 19th century Hackfall was acquired by Lord Ripon. It became a popular resort and con-

tinued so until the 1930s when it was again sold for its timber. It was from then until the 1980s that it was almost forgotten.

In 1988 the Hackfall Trust was established.

Hackfall Today

Hackfall now perhaps has a future, thanks to the close collaboration of all the stakeholders.

The Landscape Agency has been retained as our project manager. It is based in Thirsk and run by Patrick James, born and now living in Yorkshire. It was chosen by English Heritage to write the Conservation Plan, which recommended that our Hackfall Trust should carry it out.

However to do so we shall need to get formal consents from English Nature for the necessary works. This is because the woodland is a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI). And at the time of writing we do not

yet know whether these consents will be forthcoming. Perhaps the Yorkshire Gardens Trust can help us.

With the Plan in being we were able to approach the Heritage Lottery Fund. It has already grant-aided (at 90%!) some preliminary surveys to assess feasibility. It is now expecting our main bid, which Patrick and I are working on. It will take time, but watch this space. One last word: we are aiming at a better understanding of Hackfall's uniqueness, and a drier walk, not at a 'makeover', perish the thought. We are not going to 'push it up'.

*James Ramsden
Hackfall Trust*

Report from The Landscape Agency

In May 2002 the Landscape Agency co-ordinated and complete a Conservation Management Plan for Hackfall. The plan was prepared to a brief drawn up by English Heritage with assistance and input from English Nature, Woodland Trust, Hackfall Trust, Landmark Trust, Harrogate Borough Council and North Yorkshire County Council. Its purpose was to help support the future conservation and management of Hackfall. It provided a record of the historic development of Hackfall and set out, via site surveys and analysis, to provide direction for the conservation and management of this SSSI and Grade I Historic Landscape.

The significance of Hackfall arises out of its being a rare and outstanding example of the picturesque garden style of the mid 18th century and the extent to which it continues to reflect the taste



Weeping Rock, Hackfall
Bill Barber

and intentions of its creator William Aislabie, albeit somewhat faded and neglected. This combined with the fact that Hackfall is an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and contains valuable wildlife habitats and a variety of important plant communities, makes the site almost unique in Britain in that it is both Grade 1 Historic landscape and SSSI.

In terms of landscape history, Hackfall is unusual in the sense that once it had been laid out as a designed landscape in the mid to late 18th century, its subsequent owners added very little that has contributed to its significance. What remains on the ground still reflects Aislabie's designs.

In terms of the ecological significance of Hackfall, despite timber clearances in the 1910s and 1930s and subsequent neglect during much of the 20th century, its diverse range of habitats and species have been seemingly little affected and the site more than war-

rants it status as an SSSI. In addition Hackfall remains in single ownership, its territorial integrity largely unaffected by loss of land or unsympathetic development

The Conservation Management Plan researched and assembled all known sources of documentary evidence that related both to its natural history as well as its landscape history and ownership. A field survey was also completed which included field archaeology, a survey of older trees, an ecological overview and a condition survey of the listed buildings.

At a meeting held in York on 19th June 2002 the overall policies and proposals that made up the Conservation Plan were accepted by a wide ranging group of interested parties. They included English Heritage, English Nature, The Woodland Trust, Hackfall

Trust, Harrogate Borough Council, North Yorkshire County council and the Landmark Trust, all interested parties from having funded either the acquisition or the subsequent maintenance of Hackfall. This was a great step forward.

Patrick James
The Landscape Agency

How you can help

An important part of the history of Hackfall is documented in paintings, old postcards, personal photographs, diaries, papers, journals and sales catalogues - if you have any we should be thrilled to hear from you. We should be particularly interested to hear from anyone who can remember it first hand, especially pre 1930s!

The Historic Landscape Survey

As Hackfall is so well known and researched the project presented a slightly different problem to the usual historic landscape survey. Our research concentrated on trying to discover Aislalie's design ó both in terms of what it was and how it worked. This involved examining the archive sources for any clues they could give (for e.g.. extracting every refer-

ence
to



Fisher's temple at Hackfall ...

Fisher's Hall

views and noting what visitors recorded could be seen from each view-point). This gave us a series of sight-lines (connecting for e.g.. Fisher's Hall to the Sandbed Hut); this information was augmented by field work, recording on a plan the surviving historic trees and earthworks. Lost features, such as sites of seats, stretches of abandoned path, and, most interestingly, a series of depressions scooped out of the ground on the line of particular views, were located and added to the plan. As well as indicating the direction of the view, these scoops perhaps suggested its shape (and William Gilpin's 1772 sketch of the view from Kent's Seat as a circular window in the surrounding foliage may have been typical of some of Hackfall's 'peeps'). We tried to determine the planting in each area of the wood ó whether high forest, lawn, meadow, coppice or shrubbery ó and to work out how it was managed (were the goats no-

ticed by Arthur Young (*18th Century visitor*) on Raven Scar introduced to control the brambles?).

This analysis and field work revealed the skeleton of Aislalie's garden ó the form and setting of each building, what you were supposed to see from each view-point and from each stretch of path ó together with some understanding of how Aislalie intended to

achieve the effects he wanted (in addition to the 'scoops' just described, we found that in places the paths passed through cuttings, perhaps helping to visually separate one area from another, or were taken round the outside of a knoll, so that a new area of the wood was revealed as you proceeded around the hill).

The final phase, incomplete at the time of writing, would be to put flesh on these bones; to derive from all the above evidence ó descriptions, sight-lines, trees and earthworks ó a coherent and detailed account of each of Aislalie's composed views, noting plant by plant (and boulder by boulder) how they were constituted. And then, persuade all those with a stake in Hackfall to start work!

Nick Owen

Debois Landscape Survey Group

Mowbray Point (The Ruin), Hackfall

As many readers will probably be aware, the Landmark Trust has been working on the Ruin's repair for approximately the last 18 months. The estimates for a conventional main contractor route to the building's repair seemed too high and so we have adopted a low-key 'trade by trade' approach. So since February 2002 we have had a splendid local stonemason, John Maloney, working to piece the structure back together again. Almost every stone that he has worked on revealed other problems in the core of the walls, and so this work has taken much longer and therefore cost much more than we expected. Not least of the increased costs was the need to erect a full sheeted scaffold over the building to enable John and his team to continue work throughout the winter.

The stonemasonry repairs have drawn on the many skills acquired by John through working on other ruined structures such as Jervaulx Abbey. Much of the work that has been done is hidden within the core of the walls, but large amounts of reinforcement, grouting and new stone have proved necessary. It is a testament to the skill of John and his team that even the new stonework repairs on the exterior can be hard to spot.

But we can at last say that the Ruin is now safe which is a major achievement. The building has also just been re-roofed with huge York stone slabs and so the structure can continue the long process of drying out. A new access track has been put in from the Grewelthorpe to Masham road, and mains water and electricity services have been laid in underground over a considerable distance. The Landmark Trust is most grateful to Alison Brayshaw of Hackfall Farm

for her on-going help, co-operation and patience in seeing the work through to this stage.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of funds to complete the project, work at the Ruin has now stopped - but only for the time being. We have had generous grants from English Heritage and unstinting support from the Hackfall Trust, and our efforts continue to raise the money we need before restarting work. We have various 'irons in the fire' but further help is needed and any donations will be most gratefully received.

We have received tenders for many of the remaining tasks, and so we are currently putting together a package of work to complete the rest of the building. This will involve amongst other things, new doors and windows, floors, plasterwork and the plumbing and electrical services. The furnishing of the building will be carried out by Landmark's own Furnishing Manager and his team. All being well, we hope that we can finish the fitting out of the Ruin ready for letting in the early summer of 2004. We will also need John Maloney back to rebuild the arch that collapsed in 2001.

Our hope is that the Ruin's planned completion early next year will put Hackfall back on the map as one of the most important 'wild' landscape gardens of the 18th century. It should also provide a most welcome stimulus and boost to the ambitious plans that the Hackfall Trust has for the 100 acre garden. The Landmark Trust looks forward to welcoming local residents to the public open day that we will undoubtedly hold when the work is done. Watch this space! .!

*Alastair Dick-Cleland
The Landmark Trust*

If you have any comments or would like further information please contact:
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Newsletter produced by
Alison Brayshaw, Helen Lazenby and Karen Lynch
and kindly printed by

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You may like to know a little more about the organisations involved in the future of Hackfall

The Hackfall Trust

is a charity and was created in 1988 to conserve this endangered site from developers. It is non-profit making .

The Woodland Trust

acquired Hackfall in 1987/8 with a 999 year lease. Its aim is to restore, re-establish and protect native woodland sites. The Woodland Trust say Hackfall is a unique site.

English Nature

is the Government agency that champions the conservation of wildlife and geology throughout England. Hackfall is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and English Nature is the guardian of the site, which it describes as being of national importance.

English Heritage

was established in 1983. The Secretary of State is obliged to consult English Heritage on listing matters. Its stated role is to bring about the long term conservation and widespread understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment for the benefit of present and future generations using expert advice, education, example, persuasion, intervention and financial support.ø

Hackfall is a Grade I registered garden in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. Four main buildings within Hackfall are Grade II listed: Mowbray Point, Mowbray Castle, Fisherø Hall and the Rustic Temple (Hackfall Farmhouse is also Grade II).

The Landmark Trust

rescues and restores historic properties for holiday lettings. They are currently restoring Mowbray Pointø they hope to complete the work by 2004.

North Yorkshire County Council & Harrogate Borough Council

Local authorities are responsible for conservation areas.

A Conservation Area is defined by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Area) Act 1990 as an area of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Hackfall was designated a Conservation Area in April 1993. It falls within the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Therefore, special planning restrictions apply to the site including gaining the local planning authorities approval.).