

Hackfall

Newsletter 3

Spring 2008

Progress at Hackfall

Experience Hackfall has moved on apace during the past year following several years of frustration for the Woodland Trust and Hackfall Trust who much prefer action to words.

Between 2002 when we completed a Conservation Plan for Hackfall and the summer of 2006 when a full submission for funding was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund, a great number of surveys and assessments were completed, forms filled in and permissions sought, but there was little to show for this considerable effort on the ground. However this all changed at the beginning of 2007 when the Hackfall Trust and Woodland Trust secured almost £1 million to restore this Grade I historic landscape.

Part of this grant has provided the necessary funding to pay for a series of repair works at Hackfall. Many of these individual projects are now either complete or will be complete by early summer. These works include the following:

- Opening up a number of views and vistas across the woodland which have been obscured for several decades - just stand on the terrace at the Ruin by way of example.
- Repairing Mowbray Castle, the distinct eyecatcher that comes in and out of view during a walk around the site.
- Full repair of the weirs, cascades and some of the ponds that had all but disappeared at the

Grewelthorpe end of the wood

- A series of repair and drainage works across the network of paths.
- The re-creation of Fountain Plain and the impressive restoration of Fountain Pond.



Alum Spring
Photograph: David Rodway

- Restoration of a number of the smaller buildings at Hackfall including the Rustic Temple, the Grotto and Kent's Seat (this work will be complete by June 2008).

- Restoration of the 40 foot fall which can now be admired from the Grotto.

- The Alum Spring, an extraordinary natural Tufa spring, has been

revealed and can once again be admired from Kent's Seat.

An excellent team of local contractors has undertaken this work which has been completed on time and within budget. Given that the project required more than 28 different statutory consents and that many of the works were undertaken during a particularly wet summer, autumn and winter, it makes it an exceptional achievement. The Woodland Trust, Hackfall Trust as well as everyone who visits Hackfall have been incredibly patient during the past few years. I sincerely hope you feel that it has been worth the wait.

*Patrick James
The Landscape Agency*

(The Landscape Agency acted as lead consultant and landscape architect for this project. The practice is based in York).

Views and Vistas

Visitors can now begin to see why William Aislabie's landscaping at Hackfall was once so much visited and admired, even more so in its day than his father's earlier work at Studley Royal. Although the woodland is denser now than it was in his time, many of the old views now have been opened up and, as a result, the buildings and the water features can once again be enjoyed in the right relationship to each other and to the paths round the garden.

The most striking and comprehensive view is from the terrace at Mowbray Point, as it always was. But all the way round there are new glimpses of some distant feature: - of the Castle and Mowbray

Point from Limehouse Hill, of the Castle from near the Sandbed Hut and, on a still day, a reflection of Mowbray Point in the Fountain Pond.

Stand there at the edge and you will get a feel for the 'romantic ideal' which inspired Aislabie.. You are looking at a ruin, a Roman ruin, perhaps a copy of the baths of Caracalla. Inside it's now a comfortable holiday cot-

tage. To begin with it was a place for picnicking, with its own detached kitchen. But the side you see from the garden came from one of Robert Adam's sketches of ancient Rome, and reproducing it in Hackfall was meant to carry thoughts back 2000 years to there, and to fire the imagination.



C19th fanciful engraving of 40-foot fall at Hackfall.

In Hackfall the ground still looks raw and messy where we have been doing the clearing. This is because of the restrictions on any work done in an SSSI. Felled trees have to be left lying where they are and burning-up is forbidden, but they will green over with moss and eventually rot away and become useful 'habitat'.

The next and final stage of our project is to restore the smaller buildings. Once that is done, and the wood clear of machinery, we shall make a last effort to keep all paths reasonably dry. But I think Hackfall will always be 'gumboot country'.

*James Ramsden
Hackfall Trust*

Nest Boxes at Hackfall

Regular visitors to Hackfall Wood may have noticed a strange bearded figure armed with stepladder and binoculars struggling around the wood in May or June checking nest boxes. There are currently 58 boxes erected at a height of two to three metres and it would take a sharp-eyed observer to spot more than half of them. They are usually checked four times a year from the first week in May when eggs are laid, to mid-June when the young leave the nest, and a full round is a gruelling trek taking over three hours.

The boxes were originally erected in 1996 in order to encourage the small population of Pied Flycatchers to nest. Unfortunately Pied Flycatcher numbers have dwindled and for the last four years there have been no breeding records at the site. Hackfall is near the south-eastern part of the range of these birds and it is possible that climatic change may be causing the population to move further north-west. The boxes have been far from empty however and in most years 60 to 70% are occupied, usually by Blue Tits or Great Tits, and in

2007, 20 pairs of Blue Tits and 20 pairs of Great Tits laid eggs. The young suffered however in the wet summer as persistent rain meant that many caterpillars were washed from the trees and several broods failed. In recent years the boxes have been used by increasing numbers of Nuthatches. In 2007 two pairs of Nuthatches successfully raised 9 young. Boxes occupied by these beautiful birds can be recognised by the mud plastered under the lid and around the entrance hole.

Hackfall is home to all three of our native woodpeckers, although Lesser Spotted has become much rarer in the last few years. Great Spotted are by far the most common, and there are usually about three pairs nesting in the wood. Several of the nest boxes show signs of damage from these birds as they try to gain access to the tasty youngsters inside. The boxes have metal plates around the entrance holes to try and prevent this, but the woodpeckers still try to gain access at times through the front of the box or under the lids.continued page 3

Nest Boxes at Hackfall continued.....

The boxes are not only home to birds. Pipistrelle bats are commonly found, with up to 10 at a time using them as a summer roost, particularly the boxes closest to the River Ure. Several species of moth use the boxes for shelter, especially the autumn-flying Svensson's Copper Underwing which can be found in good numbers. Several boxes each year are used by tree wasps, and earwigs and several species of beetle are commonly found.

In the ten years that I have been monitoring the nest boxes the total occupancy has been impressive. The

boxes were not checked in 2001 because of foot and mouth restrictions so these are the totals for the other 11 years:

	Brood	Eggs	Young fledged
BlueTit	182	1637	1130
Great Tit	157	1310	872
Marsh Tit	1	8	8
Pied Flycatcher	14	87	37
Nuthatch	10	68	62

If you have any interesting sightings of birds or other wildlife, please e-mail me at chfletcher@btinternet.com

Charles Fletcher

Mowbray Castle - Hackfall

In the latter half of the eighteenth century John Aislabie built the mock ruin, Mowbray Castle, in his garden at Hackfall. It was once a splendid eye-catcher in a well kept garden, but as the garden faded into obscurity and became overgrown the neglected castle fell into disrepair. Rain seeped into the core of the structure, washing out the mortar and the wind abraded the surface of the stone leaving the castle in a dangerously unstable condition. Thanks to the generous Heritage Lottery grant work began in July of last year to carefully consolidate and stabilise the ruin.

The project team adopted a conservative method of repair, the aim was to retain the patina of age while reinstating the structural integrity of the castle. To the untrained eye it may look as though little has been done, but the majority of the repair work is concealed behind the original stones.

The contractor, John Maloney, and his team of

specialist masons, carefully unpicked areas of the facing stone to reveal the hollow core behind. Working in small sections, they rebuilt the core then reinstated the original facing stones. Wall tops were protected with stone flags and the masonry was repointed. Over two hundred bags of lime and three times that quantity of sand were used in the consolidation of the core and repointing of the external wall faces.



Mowbray Castle
Photograph: David Rodway

The old stone was retained wherever possible, however eroded. Gaps in stones were repaired using stone tiles; stones were only replaced as a last resort, where the existing stone had lost its structural integrity. The good matching stone was obtained from a local quarry near West Witton, though it looks very new at present, the humid woodland environment will soon encourage lichen to colonise the cut faces and blend with the old. Mortars were carefully designed to match as closely as possible to the original and incorporate crushed limestone and charcoal to mimic the texture of the original pointing.

Throughout the work great care was taken to ensure that roosting bats and birds were not disturbed by the works and wherever possible new bat roosts were incorporated into the structure. It is hoped that these roosts will encourage more bats to roost in the castle.

It is hoped that the repairs carried out will enable the castle to remain standing for another hundred years and enable a new generation of garden visitors to enjoy this stunning eye-catcher.

Linda Lockett
Architect for the repair of Mowbray Castle
and other buildings within Hackfall woods.

Grewelthorpe Beck Pool Restored

It has been many years since the pedestrian entrance to Hackfall Woods from Grewelthorpe was seen in all its glory. Now, thanks to the cooperation between the Hackfall Trust and Natural England, and with the assistance of Hackfall Farm, the entrance, pathway beyond and long pool are once again open for all to enjoy.

Until the 1930s Hackfall thrived, visitors came to buy their ticket for the woodland at Hackfall House then crossing the road they entered the woodland through a wicket gate which led onto an attractive path beside a long pool, the first in a series of pools and cascades. The Vyner family of Studley Estate sold Hackfall in 1933 after which there followed a period of decline, woodcutters felled trees and later the paths fell into disrepair, the waterfalls and cascades were damaged, the pools dwindled to streams and an air of general neglect was apparent. This neglect meant the woodland became a haven for wildlife; flora and fauna flourished contributing to its present status as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. (SSSI)

In 1987 Hackfall was for sale again and under threat of commercial development. The Hackfall Trust was created with the objective of safeguarding its future. The Woodland Trust was approached as partners and with the benefit of major financial assistance from various bodies the 999-year lease for Hackfall was acquired. A management committee was set up and eventually with the advent of 'The Lottery' the scene was set for the work to really begin with a successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The funded work has seen

views and vistas opened up, the follies consolidated and the cascades and waterways cleared.

During discussions as to how to restore the long pool at the village entrance it became apparent that the area was important for its woodland vegetation, being an SSSI, and that the then English Nature (now Natural England) were keen to ensure that its integrity remained. The Hackfall Trust was keen to restore the long pool and a compromise had to be



Grewelthorpe Beck Pool
Photograph: David Rodway

sought. The options were full restoration with a subsequent loss of vegetation, versus no restoration possible with no loss of vegetation. Obviously, in order to restore the Aislable garden design the restoration of this upper pond, opposite Hackfall House, was critical and the proposal was put forward by the Hackfall Trust to restore the pool to a slightly shorter version than the original, losing less woodland vegetation, and opening up the original wicket

gate entrance, on the road side of the pool. As this had originally been the path the vegetation was largely ivy and bramble, much less valuable ecologically than the woodland species found on the far side, where as a further compromise the path has now been closed to allow the vegetation to recover and to provide an attractive backdrop to the newly restored pool.

Once again we have an impressive entrance to Hackfall as befits the garden landscape designed by William Aislable in the 18th century.

*Rachael Wildman
Hackfall Officer*

Hackfall Open Meeting,

24th April 2008 at 7.30 p.m.

School Hall, Grewelthorpe Church of England Primary School.

If you would like any further information please contact:
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