

The Water Gardens of Brockhall

The Society met on Friday 14th November, when the subject was "The Water Gardens of Brockhall", and we were pleased to welcome two residents of Brockhall to the meeting.

We heard how Thomas Thornton inherited the manor of Brockhall in 1719. This was the same Thomas Thornton who was one of the guardians of the three Adams children of Whilton, who were orphaned while very young. Their story is told in "Living in the Gap", available from Anthea Hiscock, Langton House.

Thomas Thornton was influenced by the Franco-Dutch style of gardening, and used water sourced from the stream in the valley and springs in the hillside, to create five ponds or small lakes, a curved canal and a basin. These were focal points for avenues, plantations and gravelled and grassed walks through the park. We heard details of the six years work digging, planting, sowing, turfing and building. Hundreds of young saplings were transported from London by horse and cart and men toiled to complete this creation between 1725 and 1731. This was a triumphant achievement for Thomas Thornton - a formal layout, with parterres and a mount near the house, from which the work could be viewed.

We also heard that two generations later, his grandson found this all too old-fashioned, destroying his grandfather's garden, and making a new "picturesque" park designed by John Webb. This Thomas Reeve Thornton took five years from about 1803 to 1808 to make the main ponds into a long sinuous lake, complete with island and boathouse, and to replace the straight avenues and tree plantations with more curvaceous arrangements of lime, beech, sycamore and hornbeam.

Little remains for us to see today in very private grounds below the Hall, most hidden by trees and modern transport routes.