

IHBC East Midlands Branch – CPD event

April 2012 - Visit to Stanford Hall, Leicestershire

The IHBC East Midlands Branch Meeting was held on 13 April at [Stanford Hall](#). Stanford Hall is Grade I listed, and dates from 1697. It was commissioned for the Cave family, and initially designed by William Smith, with the 18th century alterations and additions attributed to generations of Smiths.

The grounds of the Hall are populated with heritage assets, including two sets of gates, two bridges and the Monument to Bella, all Grade II. The Branch meeting was held in the Grade II* stableblock which dates to 1737. The grounds around the Hall are a Registered Park and Garden (Grade II). The Park is thought to have originally been created by Sir Thomas Cave, who incorporated existing trees into the layout. Sir Roger Cave's alterations included the planting of six radiating avenues of (mainly) oak trees. The River Avon lies to the east of the Hall, and this was widened to create two islands in the 18th century.

While most of you can assume that much excitement was wrought by a bunch of conservation folk frolicking amongst these heritage assets, it was actually the *corticolous lichen flora* that kept us entertained. The Park achieved SSSI status in 1974 as the Park trees 'support the richest known corticolous lichen flora in the East Midlands'. However, the lichen does not just loll about on the trees of the Park, happy in its own little symbiotic relationship. It also likes to hang about on the historic building fabric. This is all well and good considering the amount of grant aid for which the Hall and Park now qualify under the [Higher Level Stewardship Scheme](#). This grant aid has been aimed at the heritage assets which would not be otherwise economically viable for the Estate to repair.





The visit started with an introductory talk about Stanford Hall by Anthony Hughes-Onslow, and was followed by Dave Pritchard from [Natural England](#). Dave discussed Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Schemes and explained their funding mechanisms and how this could relate to the historic environment through the case study of the [Higher Level Stewardship Scheme](#) in operation at Stanford Hall Park and Gardens. Dave explained how this scheme principally focussed on the natural environment but that the stewardship schemes look at the overall management of the site in question and that this meant landscape features, such as structures such as bridges and statues and even buildings such as the forge and lodges could be eligible for grant funding. Regarding the way the scheme was administered, Dave explained that he acted in partnership with the Estate Officers to prepare the scheme action plan and agreed the percentage intervention rate for each type of project. Where historic buildings and structures were involved, Dave advised he would involve the local Conservation Officer to agree schedules of work and repair specifications and seek to factor in the timeframe for any necessary consents.

Dave then conducted us on a tour of the Park, and presented us with the challenges of keeping the little lichen and historic fabric happy. Repainting the listed gates and railings was one such problem: the application of paint over the lichen was not an option. One of the listed bridges required urgent stonework repairs. However, given that it was the dead of winter, the ambient temperature around the repointed stone needed to be kept above 5 degrees centigrade.

We all know that a temporary hessian cover will do the trick...enter the lichen: the hessian would block out natural daylight, potentially killing some of the lichen. A bubble wrap solution was agreed upon. Bella the dog also deserves a mention: the monument to Bella dates to the early 19th century, and is Grade II listed. The figure of a greyhound sits on a stone plinth, and her decapitated head has recently been replaced. The remainder of the monument is also home to the lichen. The haha has been subject to significant decay of the brickwork. However, many lichen also called this home. The bricks that could be salvaged for the rebuild have been grouped strategically along the haha: this will facilitate the spread of the lichen along the new sections of brickwork. Not an aesthetically ideal solution in terms of integrating new and old fabric, but novel in the face of SSSI status.

The afternoon tour finished with some refreshments, followed by the Branch meeting in the Stable Block to which all members are able and more than welcome to attend. The meeting facilitated much interesting discussion on heritage crime and VAT as well as the more regular items on what's happening at national level and feedback from the County groups (see meeting minutes in [Archive and AGM info section](#)).

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