

## **Frodley [Fradley] Hall**

**Extract from the PhD thesis of Diane Barre  
 "Lost Formal Gardens of Staffordshire c1690-1750"  
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Frodley (or Fradley) Hall, some four miles North of Lichfield, belonged to the Gilbert family from Essex, with the estate passing to the Goring family by the marriage of Sarah Gilbert to William Goring of Kingston (Staffs), in 1672.<sup>1</sup> William Goring (1648-1710) was a second son. The couple had a very large family, and their son Henry (born 1687) succeeded to the estate in 1710, marrying Mary Backhouse of Tamworth in 1713. The estate then went to Henry's daughter Frances.<sup>2</sup>

The original house was timber framed, and when it passed to the Goring family it can have been little more than a farmhouse, since it was returned with only four Hearths in the Hearth tax Return of 1666.<sup>3</sup> According to a surviving account (reproduced below), by c.1730 the house had forty rooms. This must have included service rooms, attics, cellars etc. because the house today has fewer rooms. On stylistic evidence the house must have been modernised and extended at some time early in the eighteenth century, although it has been drastically altered over the years. Stebbing Shaw refers to "an old half timbered house"<sup>4</sup> but this is not entirely accurate and probably refers to the rear of the house which could have been faced with brick at various periods in the nineteenth century. Certainly by 1730 the entrance front had been faced with brick and extended forward on one side, involving the re-siting of some elaborately chamfered early sixteenth century ceiling beams inside. These indicate a very well built early Tudor house which may simply have been too small and old-fashioned for Henry Gilbert [Goring], who was clearly socially ambitious as he rose to become Sheriff of Staffordshire in 1723.<sup>5</sup> The money to undertake such modernisation may have come from his childless brother Thomas, who in his will of 1713 left most of his estate to Henry.<sup>6</sup>

The account refers to "pillars of the great stone gates" surmounted by stone urns (the "handsom stone flower potts") facing the stone architraves of the front door ("handsom stone door case") and the carved and gilded stone coat of arms above the

door in an "alcove". It is not clear what is meant by this alcove - it is probably the *oeil de boeuf* in the attic storey of one wing, since local tradition says that there was a coat of arms there, which is now painted over<sup>7</sup>. However a further mention of "the alcove at the centre of the house, on each side of the stone pillars [architraves] of the front door" emphasises the difficulty in working out precisely what was where on the site, because the writer's erratic punctuation confuses what is a fairly detailed description of the house and gardens.

The account transcribed below can be dated to c.1726-30 by the reference to the recent Act of Parliament 'for the Improvement of their large and valuable Commons.' This was an Act of 1725:

'for dischacing and disfranchising the Chace of Alrewas Hay, and for empowering John Turton Esq. owner thereof, to enclose such part of such Chace and for other purposes in the said act mentioned ... John Turton ... keeps great numbers of deer and conies which make vast Havock and Destruction in the several cornfield etc ... and whereas he has agreed to destroy the said deer and conies [he] be permitted to convert his enclosed portion into a park for the keeping and preserving of Deer etc .... the rest of the hay to be divided amongst those who had common rights.'<sup>8</sup>

The account is valuable in that it describes in detail what must have been fairly typical of many gentry gardens throughout the country at this period. The two references to fruit and other trees being "about eight years growth" indicates a major planting c. 1720, some ten years after Henry Goring inherited, which would match the major improvements to the house sometime in the early 18th century. The emphasis is on productive fruit trees, which are planted ornamentally. There are 23 varieties of apples listed, with a total of 86 trees (including 24 Non Pariel variety and 16 Golden Pippin). There are 19 varieties of Pears, with a total of 35 trees, 12 varieties of plums (total number 22) and seven varieties of cherries (total number 16). The less hardy apricots and peaches numbered eight varieties with a small total of 11 trees. This emphasis on hardy fruit grown on an exposed site by Alrewas Hay., echoes the words of Sir William Temple in 1685:

Fruits should be suited to the climate among us as well of the soil .. I thought it very prudent in a gentleman of my friends In Staffordshire, who is a great lover of his garden, to pretend no higher; though his soil be good enough, than to the perfection of plums; and in these (by bestowing south walls upon them) he has very well succeeded, which he could never have done in attempts upon peaches and grapes ...<sup>9</sup>

In fact Gilbert risked a few vines against a sheltered South facing wall, but with what degree of success is not known. There were in total one hundred and seventy one fruit trees, as standards, half standards, dwarfs and espaliered, plus vines and soft fruit bushes: gooseberries and raspberries and currants. The gardens were protected from the deer and from the north winds by thick hedges, and sub-divided, by more thick hedges into orchard, kitchen garden, nursery garden, and a Pleasure garden with a walled forecourt garden at the front. There do not appear to have been any brick walls at the rear, simply at the front of the house for maximum display from the road. The layout is very traditional with its rigid geometric quartering, gravel and grass walks and rows of trees, inward looking and not bringing in the surrounding agricultural area visually. From its description the garden layout could date from almost any time in the previous hundred years. The use of honeysuckle against the house, with flowering shrubs such as piracantha and jasmin "and other pretty greens" and "pretty fragrant flowers" around the entrance court walls indicates a very deliberate design to make the front of the house attractive.

The "canall at each end of the house" or "a handsom Fish pond or canall at each end" (of the nursery garden and orchard), are ornamental canals which were not only part of the decorative scheme, but also productive. The accounts for Streethay House (qv) just two miles down the road, include lists for stocking the moat and reserve pits with fish, including an item in September 1723: "Putt into Horsemoor Pitt 4 dozen of carps which I had of Capt. Goring."<sup>10</sup>

Today the large front court with its brick walls still survives but the gate piers have gone. Several of the outbuildings, or their successors, are still in the original site to the side of the house, against the road which runs in front of the house. The remains

of one canal survive in a field, now just outside the current garden area. The mid nineteenth century tithe [not tithe but estate map] map still at the house shows that both canals and the orchard survived then as did a small building next to the top canal (the garden arbour?) and another one the south side of the orchard. So today, as with so many small gentry properties of the period, there is hardly anything on site to indicate that formal gardens once surrounded the house.

An account of Fradley Hall near Litchfield in Staffordshire with the Outhouses Gardens Orchard etc which is of the free Soccage Tenure in Ancient Demesne and as such is exempted from Parish Offices, with a many other uncomon freedoms and has a free liberty of hawking hunting coursing fowling etc. belonging to it, as the present owner and his Ancestors have always done.<sup>11</sup>

Frodley Hall is a large good House containing about 40 Roomes and is scituate in a pleasant Sporting country, within 3 miles of the City of Litchfield and 5 or 6 miles of 4 other market towns, with Barnes, Stables, Coach House Dovehouse and all convenient outhouses in good repaire and 100 acres of good pasture and meadow ground lying to the same" entire within a quicksett hedge and treese growing herein, and contains 4 severall distinct yard and halfe yard lands; each entitled to a free and ample comon right, Pews in the church, 3 beaste gates apiece in a meadow called Newclose, and other ancient rights and priviledges; and all these demeanes lying comodius to the comons and having a comon right and other priviledges apptentant for 4 severall yard and halfe yard lands as aforesd. Its value will be near doubled by Vertue of the Act of Parliament lately passed for dischasing and disfranchising the Chase of Alrewas Hay and Improvmt of their large and valuable comons, containing some Thousand acres.

The Court before Frodley Hall is one of the noblest in the County and is walled round with a good brick wall, and well planted with wallfruit and other trees about 8 years growth as follows:

(Viz) against the north wall beginning to count from the house

- 1 a pound pear**
- 2 Cadillac pear**
- 3 black pear of Woster**

**4 black pear of Woster (on each side ye door going to the out yard or stables is fyne honeysuckles)**

**5 black pear of Woster**

**6 a Dutch currens**

**7 Morello cherry**

**8 Dutch Curr**

**9 Morello Cherry**

**10 Dutch Curren**

down the middle leading from the Stone Gates to the Hall door and a handsome over Cross from the kitchen Garden to the out yard or stables and the Court is handsomly divided into 4 grass plots of varyous formes, laid with the finest turfe and planted all round with round and Pyramid yews and a Silver Globe Holly in the middle of each grass plott with convenient Iron grates in the water tables by the gravell walks, for the water to run into suffes [drains] of brick all over the Court to carry the wast water into a Canall at each end of the House. The pillars of the great stone gates at the bottom of the court facing the hall door, are all of stone, with handsom stone flower potts at the topp, curyously cutt carved and painted, and a little neat stone flower pott at each end of the Pallisadoes; (extending from the gates on each side) answerable thereto; and there is a handsom stone doore case at the Hall door facing the said gates curyously cutt and painted with the Armes of the family impaled in stone in an alcove over the said door, and curyously carved and gilt. And the Alcove or middle part of the house, exactly answers the Compass of the stone gates and pallisadoes at the bottom of the Court, as the whole Court does the compass of the house, being in front about 90 foote, and the court in length proportionable, to make it an oblong square. The kitchen garden is well fenced, with a double quick sett hedge of white Thorn, Crabb Tree and holly, and the hedge row on the East and North sides is planted with Spruce and Scotch Firrs. On the backside of the house is another garden paled in, with gravell walks, an Arbour and other prety conveniencies in it; and beyond that is a very handsom large orchard, and the said Garden and Orchard is parted with a prety yew hedge; the said orchard is well fenced, with a double quick sett hedge of white Thorn, Crabb Tree and Holly, and ye crabb fence on the north side, is planted all along with walnutts, chestnuts, Black Cherry treese Syccamoors and other proper treese to break of the north wynds; and there is a codling hedge on the south side within the Ring fence; a handsom grass walk round the said orchard, and

**11 white Bonum Magnum plum**

**12 DutchCurren;**

- 13 Damascene plum,**
- 14 Dutch curren,**
- 15 muscle plum;**
- 16 Dutch curren**
- 17 Fotheringar plum**
- 18 Dutch curren;**
- 19 Queen Mother Plum**
- 20 Dutch curren;**
- 21 Russelet pear or Cuirsh Madam.**

At the south wall counting from the house is planted:

- 1 a Duke Cherry**
- 2 Orange Apricock**
- 3 Turkey Apricock**
- 4 Leshashery Pear (on each side ye door going into the kitchen garden is fyne honeysuckles)**
- 5 Colmar Pear**
- 6 a vine**
- 7 Buree pear**
- 8 a vine**
- 9 white magadalen peach**
- 10 a vine**
- 11 Right old Newington Peach**
- 12 a vine**
- 13 Chevereus peach**
- 14 a vine**
- 15 Red Roman Nectorin**
- 16 a vine**
- 17 Nivett Peach**
- 18 a vine**
- 19 Red Roman Nectorin**
- 20 Royale Peach.**

From the north wall to the Pallisadoes is planted

- 1 a White Perdigonn plum**
- 2 Orleance plum;**
- 3 Orleance plum**

and under the Pallisadoes on each side of the great stone Gates is planted

- 1 a May Duke cherry**
- 2 orange apricock**
- 3 Orange apricock.**

On the back side of the south wall next to the kitchen garden, counting from the little House is planted,

- 1 a Bonum Mangum plum;**
- 2 black pear of Woster**
- 3 Warden pear;**
- 4 bloody pear;**
- 5 Morello cherry;**

- 6 Morello cherry**
- 7 Orleance plum**
- 8 Morello cherry**
- 9 Bonum Magnum plum**
- 10 Morello cherry**
- 11 Orleance plum**
- 12 Morello cherry**
- 13 Orleance plum**
- 14 Morello cherry.**

Then at each corner of the front of the house is planted fyne honeysuckles and against the two wings is planted Philarea striped and plain Lauwrus Tinus and other greens, and in the Alcove at the center of the house, on each side the stone pillars of the hall door, is planted Piracantha, Jessamin and other prety greens, the borders under the front of the House, and at the bottom of the Court facing it, are edged with stone handsomely cut and painted; and the borders on each side the Court are edged with dwarf box, and the borders all round, planted with tulips double violets emomies auriculases, and other prety fragrant flowers There is a handsom gravell walke round the court, a noble one downe and a noble grass walk or visto in the middle facing the parlor door, and the sd orchard is handsomely divided in quarters, and ye treese following about 8 years growth, well planted in it on borders, at exact and equal distances (viz) on each side the said middle vista or walk, is a row of dwarfs, beginning to count from the garden as followes (viz)

on the south side of the said visto

- 1 a morello cherry**
- 2 orleance plum**
- 3 blackheart cherry**
- 4 apricock plum**
- 5 Bleeding Heart Cherry**
- 6 Bonum magnum plum**
- 7 May Duke Cherry**
- 8 Damascene plum**
- 9 White Heart cherry**
- 10 Violett plum**
- 11 Junyau Plum**
- 12 Flanders Cherry**
- 13 muscle plum**

from ye garden followes

- 1 a warden pear**
- 2 nonpareil**
- 3 buree winter pear**

- 4 non parell**
- 5 Buree winter pear**
- 6 Non perell**
- 7 Sumer Buree pear**
- 8 non perell**
- 9 summer buree pear**
- 10 Golden Pipin**
- 11 Black pear of Woster**
- 12 Golden pipin**
- 13 black pear of Woster**
- 14 non perell**

on the 3<sup>rd</sup> row on the south side of ye visto is a row of standards counting as before

- 1 a golden pipin**
- 2 russit pipin**
- 3 golden pipin**
- 4 margill**
- 5 non perell**
- 6 margill**
- 7 Golden pipin**
- 8 non perell**
- 9 Winter Queening**
- 10 nonperell**
- 11 margill**
- 12 non perill**
- 13 golden pipin**
- 14 golden Rennitt**

and on the north side the said visto is ye very same treese as the foregoing opposite to each other being both rowes dwarfes. The Second Row on the North Side ye visto is a row of halfe Dwarfs counting from the Garden as follows

- 1 a nonparell apple**
- 2 Red Katherin pear**
- 3 non parell**
- 4 sumer Boncritain pear**
- 5 non perell**
- 6 Hamlets Burgamet pear**
- 7 non perell**
- 8 winter Bergamet pear**
- 9 non perell**
- 10 winter Bergamet pear**
- 11 non perell**
- 12 winter Bergamet pear**
- 13 non perell**
- 14 winter Bergamet pear**

on the 2d row on the south side the visto is a row of halfe dwarfes counting

on the 3<sup>rd</sup> row on ye north side ye visto is a row of standards counting from the garden as follows

- 1 a golden pipin**
- 2 Royall permain**
- 3 russit pipin**
- 4 margil**
- 5 non perell**
- 6 margill**
- 7 Golden pipin**
- 8 non perell**
- 9 winter Queening**
- 10 golden pippin**
- 11 margil**
- 12 non perell**
- 13 golden pipin**
- 14 Kitchen Rennit**

on the 4<sup>th</sup> row of ye north side ye visto is a row of standards counting from ye garden as follows

- 1 an Orleance plum**
- 2 Harvey Apple**
- 3 Woster pearmain**
- 4 Lewns permain**
- 5 Russit permain**
- 6 French pipin**
- 7 nonsuch apple**
- 8 non perell**
- 9 Lord of Creton apple**
- 10 non perell**
- 11 Royall permain**
- 12 Golden Rennitt**
- 13 Royal permain**
- 14 Kentish pipin**

On the 4th row on the south side ye visto is a row of standards Counting from the gardenes Follows

- 1 an Orleance plum**
- 2 Lemon pipin apple**
- 3 Woster permain**
- 4 Lewns permain**
- 5 Russit pipin**
- 6 French pipin**
- 7 Non perell**
- 8 Great Harding**
- 9 Non parell**
- 10 Goose Sauce apple**
- 11 Non perell**

- 12 Golden Rennit**
- 13 Royal permain**
- 14 Golden Rennet**

On the 5<sup>th</sup> row on the north side ye visto is a row of standards counting from the garden as follows

- 1 a Swans Egge Pear**
- 2 Golden Pipin**
- 3 Golden Rennit**
- 4 Orange Burgamet Pear**
- 5 Kitchen Rennit**
- 6 Jargonell pear**
- 7 Golden pipin**
- 8 Orange Bergamet pear**
- 9 Kentish pipin**
- 10 Hurslett pear**
- 11 Holland pipin**
- 12 Golden Pipin**
- 13 Golden pipin**
- 14 Kentish pipin**

on the 5<sup>th</sup> row on the south side the visto is a row of standards counting from the garden as follows

- 1 a Swans Egg Pear**
- 2 Kentish Pipin**
- 3 Orange Bergamet**
- 4 Orange Bergamot pear**
- 5 Kentish pipin**
- 6 Hurslett pear**
- 7 Golden pipin**
- 8 Greene Russit**
- 9 Jargonell pear**
- 10 Kerton pipin**
- 11 Greene Russit**
- 12 Kerton pipin**
- 13 Golden pipin**
- 14 Holland pipin**

Which is in all 26 dwarfes, 28 half dwarfes and 84 standards: making alltogether 138 besides what is in the north hedge row and the Codling-hedge on the south side.

Severall of the quarters between the rows of treese in the orchard, are planted with some fyne white and black Spanish Goosberyes (which are great raryties) and other Gosberrtes and Currens of all kinds, Spanish nutts, filbeards and Rasberryes; and on the borders is planted white Spanish strawberries, and other strawberries of all kinds, and adjoyning to the said orchard on the north side, is a nursery wall fenced round

with a Qucksett hedge and Treese planted therein, and a grass walke between the said orchard and nursery leading, to a handsom Fish pond or Canall at each end, well stord with carpe and other fish.

Md, (Madam) all the before mentioned premises being in Mr Gorings own hands, were some years ago at the desire of the mortgagee viewed and valued by 3 susbtantiall Judicious Farmers, who computed this estate then worth 127 pounds per an. as appears by their valuation and certificate, and by vertue of the Act of Parliamt passed since for the Improvement of their large and valuable Comons containing some thousand acres, this Estate will be as near good again by reason it is entitled to Comoning for 4 severall yard and half yarde lands, which will double the quantity of land, and is freed from the great damage of the Deer and rabbits, it lying by the very Chace side.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Erdeswick, *A Survey of Staffordshire* (annotated by T. Harwood, London 1844), p 317.

<sup>2</sup> H.S. Grazebrook (ed), 'The Visitations of Staffordshire 1614; 1663-4' in *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, Vol. 5 (1885), p.153-4. Dugdale's Pedigree dated 1663 was annotated and continued by Grazebrook, using and correcting information given in Stebbing Shaw, *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, Vol. 1 (1798), pp.135-7.

<sup>3</sup> Staffordshire Record Society, *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (1923), p.187.

<sup>4</sup> Stebbing Shaw *op.cit.* P.131. He goes on to say that "this house is now occupied by a farmer." The coat of arms still remained over the door at the end of the 18th century.

<sup>5</sup> Stebbing Shaw, *op.cit.* P.xxxvii.

<sup>6</sup> Birmingham Record Office MS 3619 Acc. 1937-039/468436. An abstract of the Will of Thomas Goring of Fradley parish Alrewas, Gent. Bequests were left to his three sisters and to the Rector of Alrewas, the residue of the estate going to Henry.

<sup>7</sup> Information from the present leasees, Mr and Mrs Williams, who kindly allowed access to the house and garden.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted from H.R. Thomas, 'The Enclosure of Open Fields and Commons in Staffordshire' in *Collections for a History of Staffordshire* (1931), p.90. 345 acres were enclosed: see also W.E. Tate, 'A Handlist of English Enclosure Acts and Awards in Staffordshire' *ibid.* (1945), p.16.

<sup>9</sup> A.F. Sieveking, ed., *Sir William Temple upon the Gardens of Epicurus, with other Seventeenth Century Garden Essays* (1908), pp.42-43.

<sup>10</sup> William Salt Library, S Ms 431, The Account Book of Richard Pyott of Streethay.