

“For over 20 years it has been the vision of one person to restore a unique garden building.” Here is the story of how Gordon Smith came to rescue the early 18th century

BOWLING PAVILION

at

CUSWORTH

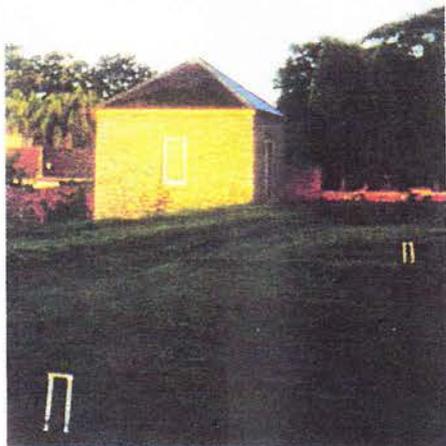


The Bowling Pavilion at Cusworth

Built as a summer house in 1726 by William Wrightson of Cusworth Hall, this unique garden building was used as a bowling pavilion from c.1733 when the bowling green was laid out. Following the demise of the Cusworth Estate, after the death of the last resident Squire, Mr R.C. Battie-Wrightson, in 1952, the Bowling Pavilion fell into disrepair. By 1972 it was entirely vandalised. From 1991 this Grade II listed building has been carefully restored under the patronage of Mr Gordon Smith who has supervised and personally financed the project. The Pavilion and Bowling Green were part of the Old Cusworth Hall Estate. Since 1952 this belonged to the late Squire's sister, Mrs Barbara Pearse, who died in London in 1989. Mrs Pearse conveyed this property, the church and other adjacent buildings, to a private trust called the Cusworth Church Lands of which Mr Gordon Smith, of Church Cottage, is senior trustee.

Illustrations

1. *Bowling Pavilion 1994*
2. *Bowling Pavilion 1990*
3. *Ceiling by Edinburgh artist William Scott, responsible for the trompe l'oeil interior paintings.*



During the sweltering hot summers of 1726-27, William Wrightson decided to build a stone summer house at Cusworth. This was to enhance the large, sloping parterre garden to the south of his home, the Elizabethan Cusworth Hall. By the 1730s such formal gardens had become unfashionable. It was, therefore, banked up and terraced to create a bowling green with steps leading down to an enclosed rose garden. From that time the Summer House became known as the Bowling Pavilion.

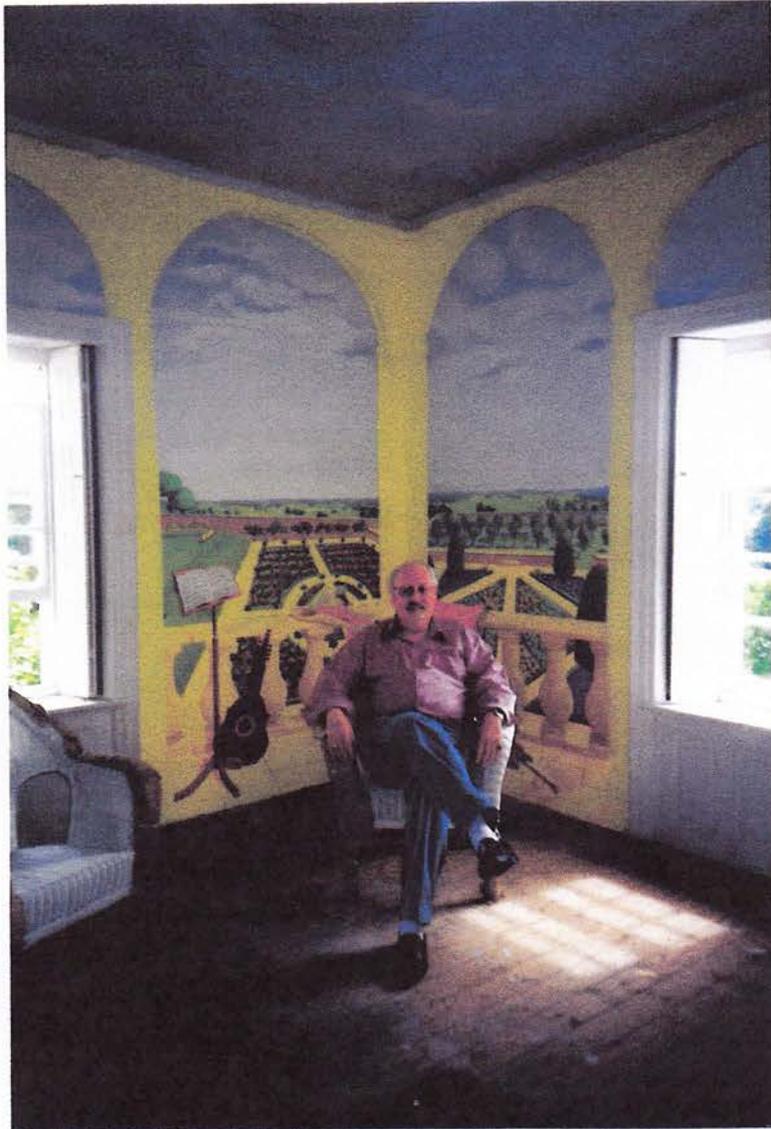
The new and present Cusworth Hall was built in the 1740s on a hill to the west of the old house, which was later demolished. Its site has since been occupied by service buildings for the Estate's Head Gardener. These properties are now called Cusworth Glebe and Church Cottage. The Bowling Pavilion remained in use to provide summer shelter and for storing bowling equipment. In 1907 Lady Isabella Battie-Wrightson included the Bowling Pavilion in her improvement scheme for Cusworth Hall and grounds. The exterior walls of the pavilion were rendered in pebbledash; the weathervane repaired; the interior whitewashed and a fireplace installed. It was later used as the Gardener's Office. During the Second World War most of Cusworth Hall and the adjacent woodland was used by the military authorities. The Bowling Green, being the only flat lawn at Cusworth, was requisitioned by the Royal Corps of Signals and a corner site used to accommodate carrier pigeons. It was intended to use the birds for relaying messages between the military bases at Cusworth Hall and neighbouring Hickleton Hall, had Doncaster telephone exchange been destroyed by enemy action. The circular concrete bases, upon which the wooden huts stood, were only removed in 1990 and the area returned to a lawn.

Locally the Bowling Green was referred to as "the most atmospheric place in Cusworth". Following the demise of the Cusworth Estate after the death of the last resident squire, Mr. R.C. Battie-Wrightson, in 1952, the Bowling Pavilion eventually fell into disrepair. Between 1953 and 1960 the walled gardens were leased to a market gardener for commercial use. The Bowling Green was used to grow raspberries and the upper floor of the pavilion to make-up and store wreaths. The lower room and Rose Garden became a pig sty. By 1972 the pavilion had been completely vandalised. Doors and internal fittings of the upper floor were all stolen. Open window cavities were subsequently filled in with breeze-blocks to secure the building against possible structural damage and to prevent unauthorised entry. Loose slates were removed for safety reasons. Estate records show the Builder's account for this work in April 1973 to be £50. Eventually the rood timbers collapsed inwards. Fortunately the 1726

weathervane was salvaged and kept, along with the king-post, at Church Cottage. The king-post was an important item to save because it provided evidence of the exact roof height. In March 1990, after consultation with English Heritage, the two-storey Bowling Pavilion and walled gardens were Grade II listed. During July and August 1991, having stood roofless and empty for twenty years, the attractive hipped roof was rebuilt. The materials used are reclaimed Welsh slate, lead mop-roll hipped gables and surmounted by the restored original 18th century weathervane. The first phase of the upper floor restoration work was carried out in 1992. This included reinstatement of a wooden floor, sash windows (each with 15 panes of glass), panelled double doors, plasterwork, interior shutters and window seats. These were all made to the original designs and the front doors painted in blue and grey, as before. The absence of skirting boards and ceiling cornice suggest that the walls were originally painted with trompe l'oeil garden scenes, otherwise known as 'a garden within a garden'. By 1907 these may well have become dilapidated and whitewashed over at the time of Lady Isabella's improvements. Her daughter, the late Mrs. Barbara Pearse, who gifted this part of Cusworth to the Cusworth Church Lands Trust, once remarked that the Bowling Pavilion was "the only artistic building on the estate". The shutters would, therefore, have served not only as a security measure but also to protect the delicately painted walls from the bleaching effect of the low winter sun. In order to recreate a scenic atmosphere, mural painter William Scott of Perth in Scotland has been commissioned to carry out the trompe l'oeil painting. After much thought and discussion it was decided to recreate, on all eight wall panels, views from each window as they would have appeared in the 1730s. Architectural drawings, open books, discarded hats and cloaks, a music stand and an 18th century English guitar, are all in evidence within the paintings. Amid all this colour and activity there is only a suggestion that somewhere people are about. But, like the ghosts of the past, they are not seen ! The ceiling is most dramatic, the centrepiece being the heraldic shield of Cusworth's present Lord of the Manor. It is emblazoned with a magnificent sun-in-splendour and the entire device appears to be descending from a blue, yet whisply clouded sky.

For over twenty years it has been the vision of one person to restore the Bowling Green and its unique garden building. The restoration programme has, therefore, been supervised and the Pavilion personally financed by that person, who is Mr. Gordon Smith of Church Cottage, resident Trustee of the Cusworth Church Lands and last Agent to the Battie-Wrightson family of Cusworth Hall and Estate. When asked to comment on the nearly finished project, Mr. Gordon Smith said:

“For years I have been determined to see the Pavilion back in use. As a boy I remember it so well. A symmetrically proportioned stone building sitting ahead of the Bowling Green and rising with such elegance above the orange brick walls of the kitchen garden . The restoration work has all been worthwhile and I hope that my contribution in keeping alive this part of old Cusworth will be respected and enjoyed by many for years to come.”



In March, 2004, ownership of the bowling green, terrace and former rose garden passed to Doncaster Metropolitan District Council and has again become part of Cusworth Hall Gardens. Mr. Gordon Smith is still Trustee of the Cusworth Church Lands and the Old Cusworth Estate, though now resides at 13 Rue Kamel El Kilani, Alexandria, Egypt. He has decided to establish a charitable trust in order to secure future funding and maintenance of this important site.

1726 - 27

Extracts from the Cusworth Cash Book, written in William Wrightson's hand, showing the total amounts paid to buildings and craftsmen for work at "ye Summer House".

3 June, 1726	B. Whitaker	£2. 2s. 0d.
27 July, 1726	John Hill	£3. 3s. 0d.
2 November, 1726	(Wm. Nodder) "below ye Summer House"	£1. 0s. 6d.
29 September, 1727	Sam. Watson	£3. 15s. 6d.
A total of £10. 1s. 0d.		

1991 - 96

Today's builders and craftsmen involved in the restoration work are:

Builders:	Brian Cocksedge, Conisbrough David Thompson, Cusworth
Plasterer:	Garry Shorthose, Doncaster
Joiner:	Phil Cooper, Retford
Painter (Exterior):	Ken Stevenson, Scawsby
Decorative Artist:	William Scott, Perth
Blacksmith:	Louis Yates, Bentley