



A NEW DAWN

Tom Stuart-Smith is stretching his horizons by helping to restore a very grand estate - it has called for big ideas and two million plants



Five miles south of Stoke-on-Trent, Trentham lies on the bank of the river whose name it bears. It began as a royal manor and priory and was acquired by the Leveson family - later to become Leveson-Gower. As the family became ever grander, the house and garden were greatly enlarged, and many of the great names in English architecture and gardening worked there - including Capability Brown. From the 1830s, George Leveson-Gower, the Second Duke of Sutherland, commissioned Charles Barry to design a new Italianate palace - and garden to match. The palace stood at the head of a formal terraced garden extending to more than ten acres and leading down to Capability Brown's 50 acre lake, making it the largest garden of its kind in the kingdom.

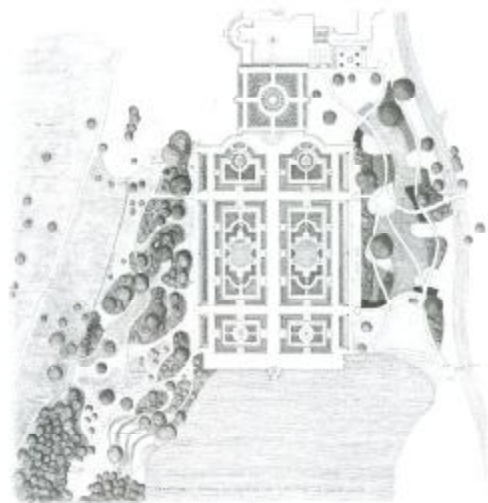
But, by the 1860s, the River Trent, carrying huge amounts of effluent from the Potteries, had become 'a foul, slimy sewer'. So, by 1900, the Sutherlands had abandoned the house and in 1912 it was demolished.

When I first saw the garden it was magnificent - but sad. The Irish yews, intended by Barry to resemble Italianate cypresses, looked

more like Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs, while buddlejas sprouted from the orangery and decaying garden temples. In 1996, a property consortium with a vision bought the estate and decided to make it a major leisure attraction. Central to this was to be the restored garden.

A group of designers, including Piet Oudolf, Dominic Cole and myself, are responsible for recasting the core of the garden - overseen by Michael Walker, who until recently was the head gardener at Waddesdon Manor. Over the next eighteen months we will be planting nearly two million plants. You might imagine that we would be replacing plant for plant the Victorian planting schemes, but, fortunately, we are only doing this to a limited extent in one part of the garden for which accurate records remain. The new planting will be interlocking drifts of perennials, not rigid blocks of bedding salvias. English Heritage have been supportive of this approach, realising that it will make for a much richer experience. Trentham may soon become one of the most visited gardens in the country.

Trentham, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 8AX. Open until 3 October, 10am-6pm (or dusk). Tel: +44 (0)1782 657341. www.trenthamleisure.co.uk



TOP The existing vista to the huge lake at Trentham in Staffordshire. **ABOVE** The masterplan is to restore the magnificent Italianate gardens that were laid out in the 1830s by Charles Barry, but using a softer planting scheme.