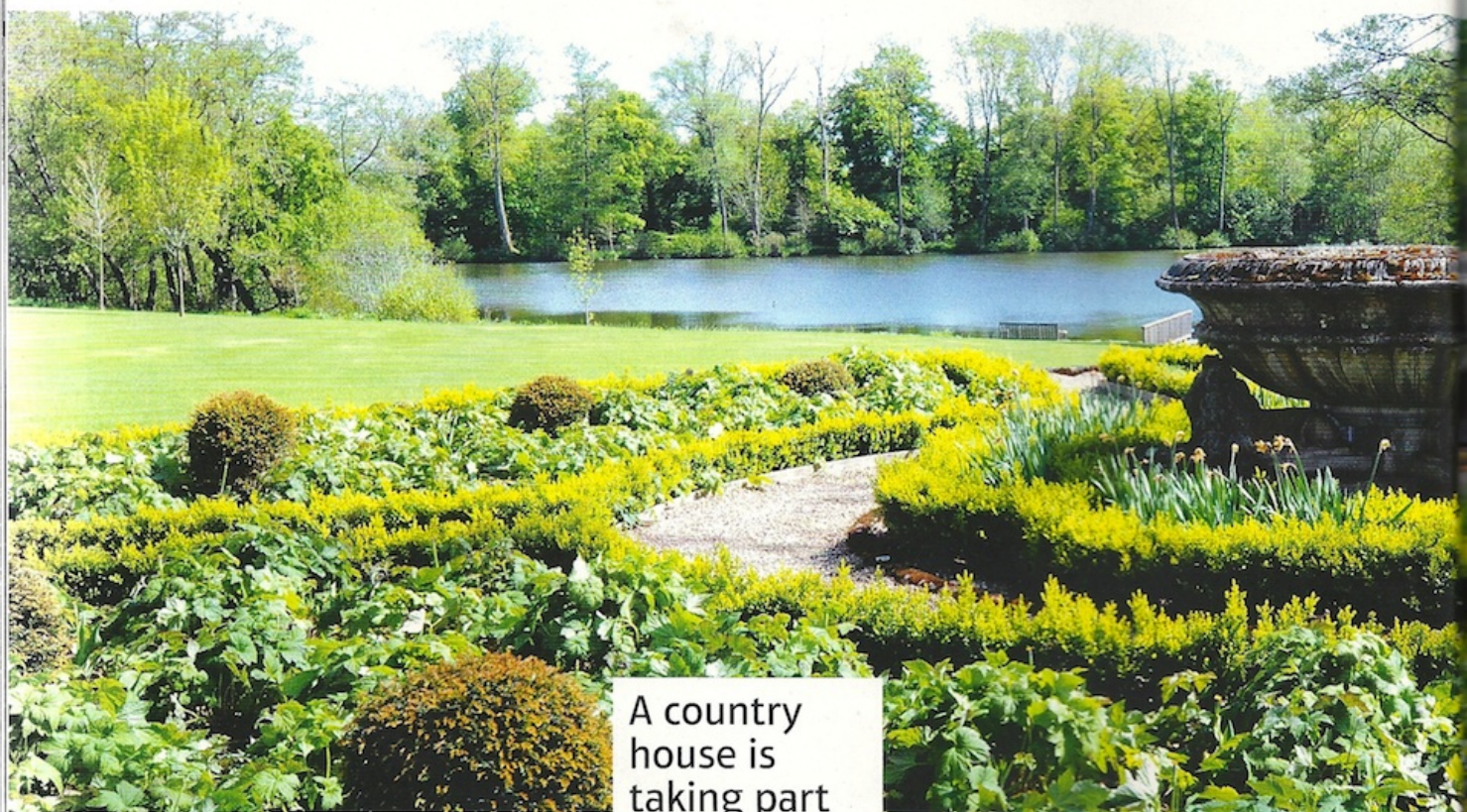


Back to nature



Being the custodian of one of Herefordshire's beautiful country houses brings with it a sense of responsibility to the wider community and it's an imperative that Jenny Daneels Watt at Newport House in Almely feels keenly, and one that has led to her involvement in a unique project.

Jenny and her husband David moved to the property in 2004, transforming it into a family home after a chequered history which had seen it, in one incarnation, as a TB hospital – the head gardener now lives in the house that was built for the sanatorium's doctor.

The previous occupants had, says Jenny, completely refurbished the house, but still today, there is work that needs doing. It's an ongoing process and one that requires considerable reserves of energy, she reports.

In 2011 Jenny joined the team at The Cart Shed, an organisation that offers many opportunities

A country house is taking part in a unique project to promote the benefits of outdoor life – and it's hosting an ambitious sculpture exhibition to raise funds. Philippa May finds out more

to learn new skills, gain qualifications, improve health and wellbeing and have fun through coppicing and greenwood crafts, gardening courses and children's woodland activities, some of which take place in the woodland around Newport House.

In October, the glorious grounds will provide the setting for an ambitious sculpture exhibition, organised to raise both funds and awareness for The Cart Shed, a project that is guided by the belief that being involved with nature has benefits for everyone. Activities such as gardening, simple wood work and coppicing can have an emotionally healing effect, and the woodland and gardens at Newport House are used weekly to provide these benefits to adults who need some time in an unpressured environment and students who engage more with practical than academic work.

Earlier this year The Cart Shed was awarded a bursary by the Royal Welsh Agricultural

Society to create a show garden, the design for which, by David Gray, was based on The Cart Shed logo. Young people on the Live and Learn programme then spent several weeks working with tutor Roger Ings to create a stunning structure comprising hazel hurdles and cleft wood fencing.

"It was a fantastic opportunity to show off the skills that have been learned by some of our participants", says Katie Eastaugh, director of The Cart Shed. "They worked hard and achieved a great deal, it was an inspiration to all involved".

The Cart Shed team comprises gardeners, foresters, farmers, occupational therapists, mothers and volunteers and enthusiasts to provide courses and activities for everyone who visits.

Director Katie Eastaugh has a special interest in exploring the efficacy of green space therapies and runs green woodworking courses at Newport House.

"The impact of what we offer is such that we've seen participants becoming able to live an independent life out of hospitals or institutions, being more able to cope with the negative consequences of their condition and we've seen young people at risk of exclusion from school finding direction, gaining qualifications and overcoming some of the issues that put them

at risk in the first place," she says.

So beneficial have the effects been that The Cart Shed has realised that what participants have gained from their experience is something everyone should have access to, and now offers access to anyone in search of re-connecting with nature.

"The Cart Shed is about simply enjoying being outdoors. Making a fire, sitting by the fire, chatting with other participants, enjoying the sounds of the birds, the wind. It's about letting go, and just being," says Katie.

In the walled garden – a description that might suggest a small, contained microclimate, but which in fact more resembles a walled field, albeit with a Grade I listed wall – Lynette Choppin is in charge of gardening courses. The walled garden was originally in the ownership of the council but as Jenny and David moved in, it was found that the wall needed renovation and they took it over. "We employed a bricklayer five years ago," says Jenny, "and he's still here now."

The extensive garden, including greenhouses which have been rebuilt on the original early 20th century ironwork, grows enough for Newport House, the family and staff to be self-sufficient. "We grow two tonnes of potatoes every year," says Jenny. In the tropical greenhouse, a particular interest of David's, there's even the possibility →



ABOVE the gardens of Newport House

RIGHT Katie Eastaugh, director of The Cart Shed, and Jenny Watt, of Newport House, in the walled garden

INSET, FROM TOP *Emerge* by William Peers, deer by Sally Matthews and *Locutus* by Jonathan Loxley on display on the house's lawns to raise awareness of The Cart Shed's work





Try it out

The Cart Shed runs day sessions in the woods from 10am to 3pm where you can coppice (cut young branches in the autumn), whittle (spoons and bowls), sculpt wood with a pole lathe, make baskets out of willow, cook on the wood fire, and eat lunch made with locally grown vegetables and home-reared pigs.

The sessions are open to everyone, and activities are suited to all levels of experience and fitness.

The Cart Shed provides the tools, the material and the food. Visit thecartshed.co.uk to find out more.

← that they'll be drinking home-grown tea and coffee, with tea and coffee plants in among the bananas, papayas and orchids.

October's exhibition, entitled *Out of Nature* (www.outofnature.co.uk), will showcase the ways in which sculptors interpret their response to the natural environment and the natural materials with which they work, to create a world of meaning and expression, their humanity or even divinity.

The gardens at Newport House are already home to two distinctive sculptures – a life-sized deer, created from natural materials by Herefordshire-based sculptor Sally Matthews and *Locutus* by Jonathan Loxley, whose work can be seen at the prestigious Goodwood Sculpture Park. Loxley moved to Carrara, Italy, in search of something more 'solid' than the film career he had left behind, and found marble, "the ideal carving element, allowing unimpeded thought processes within the interior space of the stone". He now works in his Wiltshire studio, making regular visits to Carrara to source marble for his work.

Among those also exhibiting in October will be the sculptor Peter Randall-Page, who has undertaken numerous large scale commissions and has work in the permanent collections of the Tate Gallery and the British Museum amongst others. His practice has always been informed and inspired by the study natural phenomena and its impact on our emotions.

William Peers, meanwhile, a stone sculptor based in Cornwall, has recently completed a project to make 100 sculptures in 100 days.

Local sculptor Will Carr works in steel to create both abstract and figurative sculptures. "I have a passion for understanding the world around us," he says. "I am intrigued by the varied forms nature has created and I love understanding how everything interacts, from the intrinsic properties of nature at



ABOVE The greenhouses have been rebuilt on the original ironwork.

INSET Everything from coffee and tea to papaya is grown on the estate



TOP Forester Mike Weston shows Tomas Day how to make fire

ABOVE: Forester Mark Bennett splits wood with Tom Crowe

molecular and biological levels, up to theories of our universe."

There will also be work from sculpting couple Matt Lane Sanderson and Rachel Wood.

"I single out the 'oddball', the 'bold', the 'poser', the 'bewildered' and the 'quirky'," Rachel says about her work. "I'm less concerned with making copies of nature and more interested in the life within the creature."

Matt is a designer, metalsmith and sculptor currently engaged on a number of public art projects across the UK, who works full-time as a sculptor, while Rachel works once the children are in bed!

Proceeds from the exhibition will be used to support the activities of The Cart Shed, whose work transforming the lives of people by bringing them into the woods and walled garden, demonstrates the extraordinary healing power that comes 'out of nature' ●