



Caldwell's Nurseries Project

Oral history

<http://www.caldwellarchives.org.uk/>

Tom Acton interviewed by Gill Crook

Tom Acton was head gardener at Arley Hall, Cheshire from 1960, and a customer of Caldwell's.

Duration:	00:36:02
Recording date:	18.11.2011
Recording Location:	Mr Acton's home.
Access restrictions:	None
Recording equipment:	Zoom H4N
Recording notes:	-
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Interview summary

00.00.40	Demobbed in 1948 and almost immediately came back to Arley – the gardens had been turned into a market garden
00. 01.05	Worked under about three different head gardeners for next 10 years
00.01.15	Used to drive a van - van drivers were at a bit of a premium – drove produce to Altrincham, Warrington, sometimes Manchester market
00.01.49	Planted an orchard at Arley in the 1950s – bought fruit trees from Clibrans , Altrincham
00.02.29	<p>Contact with Caldwell's rep Mr Haliburton</p> <p>“But then I became head gardener at Arley in 1960. Market gardening (during the war and just after) was finished and it was during the 1960s when I did have some limited contact with Caldwell's. The dealings I had with Caldwell's were through a man called Haliburton , Mr Haliburton, and he was a kind of representative for Caldwell's. I can't remember his first name, but I knew him quite well. Basically what he was, he was a representative. He used to travel round, and mainly, if someone asked for advice at Caldwell's it was Haliburton they'd send out and he spent most of his time on the road. I don't know if he used to do some work at the nursery as well, but it was Haliburton I used to see.</p> <p>There was quite a lot of gardening going on and business created for someone like Caldwell at that time, because in this area, Wilmslow, Knutsford, Bramhall, all round here there were people with bigish gardens. This is what Haliburton spent his time doing, going round, it was through him really. I don't really remember going to Caldwell's much, but I do remember him coming out often to visit me.</p>

	<p>Because, when I was appointed head gardener at Arley, it was then that the garden was restored. It had been neglected through the war and also during the period of market gardening. All the effort, during the war, had been concentrated on food production in the kitchen garden. The market gardening was mainly in the kitchen garden. So, the pleasure gardens were largely neglected, so there was a big job in restoring those. It was during that period that I used to see Halliburton and it was during that period that he used to come out 2 or 3 times a year. I do remember having close contact with him over the planting. This was the kind of thing he would do.</p> <p>The restoration of the garden at Arley was conducted under the direction of the Viscountess, Lady Ashbrook. She inherited the place. She was very keen on having the garden restored. She didn't like this market gardening business. They stopped market gardening. It was then I was appointed head gardener. There was a lot of talk about what we should do. One of the main jobs in the early 60s was replanting the herbaceous border. I used to talk to Halliburton about those herbaceous plants. It's possible that Halliburton may have brought one or two herbaceous plants. He might have suggested one or two things."</p>
00.05.59	"Used to talk to Halliburton about those herbaceous plants he might have suggested. I had to recreate those borders that had been grassed down. The garden was restored more or less on a shoestring. I raised quite a lot from seed."
00.08.13	Lady Ashbrook was very keen on what she planted. She was an artist. She didn't want colours that clashed.
00.08.48	Raised campanula lactiflora – selected blues that we wanted for borders. Took out wishy washy colours
00.10.00	I do remember talking to Colin Pritchard, one of the early head gardeners at Tatton Park
00.10.26	We had all the restoration projects in hand and were doing several things – creating a ha-ha, kitchen garden, a herb garden and a scented garden over the next 20 years
00.11.18	In the walled garden had to get shut of all the fruit trees, redcurrants, blackcurrants – in the first year just weed killed
00.14.56	<p>Planting in the walled garden</p> <p>"So, it was possibly maybe 1962/63 when we were planting (the walled garden), maybe before that, that we were planting some of the beds. At the north end of the walled garden, and it's still there, we created a bed there planted with roses, a cerise red or cerise pink called Rosemary rose. Lady Ashbrook and I were discussing how we should edge this bed, we wanted something else you see. She suggested that we should plant catmint , which is blue and would go well.</p> <p>I was inclined to be against it because of when I served my time in the garden in the war before I went into the Royal Airforce. I was like an apprentice at Arley from 1940 to 1944. I remember down this avenue of pear trees in the main kitchen garden we had herbaceous plants underneath the pear trees, and the edging all the way down the walk was catmint on either side as an edging. I do remember , and we kept this going as much as we could during the war, vegetables were grown behind this avenue, imagine pear trees on either side. The idea being in Victorian times they set out the kitchen garden so that it was an amenity garden as well, so that guests in the house could come and walk round and the growing of the vegetables was more or</p>

	<p>less hidden.</p> <p>I remember that every year I used to have to propagate cuttings from this catmint, because every year we lost about 25/30% of them in the winter for one reason or another, wet I think. That variety of catmint was one called mussinii and I used to say to her I'm not very happy about this because I'm going to have to keep growing this catmint. So, we had a big discussion about this. During the course of the discussion at some stage Mr Haliburton turned up. He was interested in what we were doing and I told him about this business, that there was a big argument going on and I didn't want to plant this catmint and he agreed with me that it wasn't, it was a hardy plant but you couldn't rely on it. So, he said there is one and it's called Six Hills Giant. He said, that won't die out. That's one purchase that we got from Caldwell's."</p>
19.06	"The roses came from a place called Sunningdale Nurseries, because I am not sure whether Caldwell's could supply them. Quite a lot of the roses you could not buy at local nurseries at this time, particularly shrub roses. They just weren't there."
20.06	Halliburton said I will find Six Hills Giant – they are still there
23.08	Mr Halliburton had recommended this catmint. It was so vigorous
28.09	As time went on Lord Ashbrook was keen on growing stuff for sale. Would propagate from the herbaceous border and sell
30.09	From mid 70s didn't need to go to Caldwell's – would buy wholesale
33.46	Mr and Mrs Caldwell, after sold the business, came to live in property in Great Budworth house called the Dene.